

# BRILL'S STUDIES IN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

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Anno incarnationis domini octo dccc lxxxi xlv k octobr lxx. i.

Dum legaliter sanctum antiquitatis tenetur. & cunctis cum oblationibus dominorum  
testis tradere filios in templum dei feliciter servituros. proculdubio hoc domini filius  
faciendum est salubre praebeat exemplum. de quibus dominum iudicio creatoris in domino  
reddere fructum. Idcirco ego oda hunc filium meum nomine domini cum oblatione  
in manu atque portatione abbas pallam an meam in uoluntate ad nomini sermigi ut ad coru  
quorum & iam in reliquis continentur. & abbas p[ro]fiteri tradit cont[ra]ctus p[er]mansuri  
taut ab hac die non liceat illi colli de sub uigo regule excutere. sed magis eiusdem regule  
fideliter se agnoscat in facie seruare. & dominus p[ro]p[ri]a animi mulgare. & uero ma  
nifesta in non uulsa p[er]maneat. promitto cum uero uisendo corado & angelis suis. quia  
nūquam p[er] me. nūquam suspecta p[er]sona. nec quolibet modo p[re]summatum facultates aliquando  
excedendi domonasterio occasione tribua. & uero in me traditio firma & in conuulsa  
p[er]maneat manu propria subter firmam. Signu adu[er]sarij cuius fieri & firmare rogauit.  
Signu adaloni Signu fratelli Signu p[re]b[er]is Signu Godboldi  
Signu Uuamendi

Anno dccc lxxxi lds eodemmo k nouemb[er] fep. i. hoc emissa in hunc coram

Dum legaliter sanctum antiquitatis tenetur. & cunctis cum oblationibus  
domini parentis suos tradere filios in templum dei feliciter servituros. p[er]cul  
dubio hoc domini filius faciendum est salubre praebeat exemplum.  
de quibus dominum iudicio creatoris in domino nobis reddere fructum. Idcirco ego  
achadeus comes hunc filium meum nomine hilduini cum oblatione  
in manu atque portatione abbas pallam an meam in uoluntate ad nomen sei  
remigi uel eorum quorum & iam in reliquis continentur. & p[ro]fiteri  
p[re]posito eiusdem loci in uico abbatis p[re]sente traditio corado & supra  
dictis locum monachis. Teutboldo p[re]b[er]o. Hardrado p[re]b[er]o. Guntario &  
bernario diaconibus. p[er]mansuri. taut ab hac die non liceat illi col  
li de sub uigo regule excutere. sed magis eiusdem regule fideliter  
se agnoscat in facie seruare. & dominus p[ro]p[ri]a animi mulgare. & uero ma  
nifesta in non uulsa p[er]maneat. promitto cum uero uisendo  
corado & angelis suis. quia nūquam p[er] me. nūquam suspecta p[er]sona.  
nec quolibet modo p[re]summatum facultates aliquando excedendi  
demonasterio occasione tribua. & uero in me traditio firma  
& in conuulsa p[er]maneat. manu propria subter firmam. & aliorum  
bonorum hominum manu corrob[or]ari studui. Signum achaderi  
comitis qui hanc carta fieri & firmare rogauit. Signu Beronis.  
Signu haganonis. & Gisleb[er]ti.

Odofealeo.  
Stephano.  
Siglardo  
subdiacono.

220

Two oblation charters from the Register of Rheims (BN lat. 13090, fol. 75r). Both charters, dating from 881, are special in their own right. In the first an unknown woman, Oda, offers her son Emmo; the second represents a highlight in the history of St Remi, for it was drawn up for the redoubtable Count Achadaeus offering his son Hilduinus. (See chapter III, par. 3.)

# IN SAMUEL'S IMAGE

*Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West*

BY

MAYKE DE JONG



E.J. BRILL  
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*IN MEMORY OF ROBERT COHEN*



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## PREFACE

This book has been long in the making. It was first conceived of as a Dutch dissertation and submitted at the University of Amsterdam in 1986. An English translation should have been produced soon afterwards, but equally soon I was appointed to the chair of Medieval History in Utrecht. Those putting their remarkable confidence in me should not be disappointed, I felt, so I threw myself into teaching, administration and new projects. In the course of those hectic years, a proper 'translation' became a more and more distant vision. As Rosamond McKitterick justly remarked while we waited for a train in Utrecht, one should either do it quickly, or write an entirely new book.

I decided to heed the second part of her good advice, and the opportunity to do so presented itself when I again received a fellowship from The Netherlands' Advanced Institute for the Study of the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NIAS) in 1993-1994 – the very place where I wrote my dissertation roughly a decade earlier. Together with his dedicated staff, the then director of NIAS, Dirk van de Kaa, earned my undying gratitude. Constantly stimulating a wide range of scholarly activities, they managed to create a combination of solitude and sociability within which the likes of me flourish. Conversations with my fellow-fellows Sally Wyatt, Douglas E. Lewis and Marek Zvelebil added much to the spice of NIAS life. Reading their work on information technology, Indonesian ritual and Mesolithic societies turned out to be a considerable stimulus to a medievalist in the throes of creation.

I could enjoy this peaceful sabbatical thanks to my colleagues in Utrecht, not only those in the section of Medieval History, but also my fellow administrators in the Board of the Faculty of Arts. As usual, I tried to do six impossible things before breakfast: finishing a book and doing a stint of administration at the same time. I have been very lucky in my fellow board members, who were not only tolerant, but even positively supportive of my inveterate scholarly pursuits. This shows, to my mind, that universities are still best managed by



administrators who are scholars at heart. In the person of our excellent Dean, Wiecher Zwanenburg, I thank them all.

Writing a book is a lonely adventure, it is said, but I frankly admit to having relished the many hours of solitude. I was blessed with a veritable support team, however, to which I am now about to acknowledge my profound debt. Arjo Vanderjagt was the most patient and encouraging of editors. Dirk Vrakking read my manuscript early on, sharing his inside knowledge of Benedictine life with me. Albert de Leeuw laid down some bibliographical ground rules to which I adhered religiously ever since. Jinty Nelson and Rob Meens served as my proverbial benevolent readers when the text was nearly completed. If my comments on matters such as *puellae oblatae* and penance make more sense than they did before, I owe this to their trenchant and illuminating criticism. Amidst loads of work, Jinty even took the trouble to eliminate any Dutch-isms she found in my text. If any are left, they are my responsibility; doubtless I managed to slip in some new specimens.

At the final stage, two of my students joined forces with me – with a vengeance. Albrecht Diem soon realised that a chaotic Dutch-woman could only survive with the help of a thorough German, and firmly took the checking of footnotes in hand. In the hot summer of 1995 Carine van Rhijn proof-read the entire text, subsequently master-minding ‘Operation Index’. I owe both of them a great deal, not least because they succeeded in turning the usually tedious last phase of production into a highly entertaining joint venture. Preparing the manuscript for the press, we profited immensely from Lidy van Roosmalen’s indispensable assistance. In her most capable hands ‘camera-ready copy’ became a feasible proposition. Where would the Utrecht History Department be without her?

Still, this book would not have materialised without Esther Cohen. Every word which follows passed her scrutiny, and a lot more I wisely decided to delete. She prodded me on, clamouring for ‘Sammy’ to be finished (*‘et caeterum censeo Samuelem perficiendum esse’*), criticised early drafts, edited later ones, answered my barrage of e-mail messages in a jiffy, propped me up whenever I needed it, and scolded me when I could do without it. In short, she was a support team all by herself. Through thick and thin, our friendship and co-operation has become a joy for life.

To my great regret, Esther's husband Robert Cohen did not live to help us celebrate the publication of 'Sammy'. He died suddenly on April 6th 1992, at age 45. From the time we became friends in NIAS in 1984 until the day of his premature death he backed me to the hilt. His faith in me was unlimited, also when I thought it entirely misjudged. He was the first to urge me to apply for the chair in Utrecht, maintaining that this was my kind of job. As usual, he was right. He was a great source of happiness and fun to those around him; I cherish memories of days spent with him and his family, filled with endless talk and laughter. An excellent and original historian of Dutch Jews in the eighteenth century, he died in the middle of research, with one book published and other interesting projects in progress. As early medieval monks and nuns knew very well, commemoration is the best way for the living to retain their ties with the dead. Hence, I dedicate this book to Robert's memory.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur</i> , ed. J. Bollandus et al., Antwerp and Brussels 1643-
AHC	<i>Annuario historiae conciliorum</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
ALW	<i>Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft</i>
AQ	<i>Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters</i> , Darmstadt
ASOB	<i>Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti</i> , ed. J. Mabillon, 9 vols., Paris 1668-1701
BM	<i>Benediktinische Monatsschrift</i>
CCM	<i>Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum</i> , ed. K. Hallinger, Siegburg 1963-
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis</i> , Turnhout 1966-
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna 1866-
DA	<i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i>
DACL	<i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i> , ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, Paris 1924-
DThC	<i>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</i>
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
FmSt	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
FSI	<i>Fonti per la storia d'Italia</i> , Istituto storico per il medio evo 1887-
HRG	<i>Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte</i>
HZ	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>
LQF	<i>Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen und Forschungen</i>
LfThK	<i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i>
Mansi	J.D. Mansi (ed.), <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio</i> , 31 vols., Florence and Venice 1757-1798

MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
Auct. Ant.	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
Capit.	<i>Capitularia regum Francorum</i> , ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, 2 vols., Hannover 1883-97
Capit. episc.	<i>Capitula Episcoporum</i> , ed. P. Brommer, Hannover 1984
Conc.	<i>Concilia</i> II, ed. A. Werminghoff, Hannover 1906-8; III, ed. W. Hartmann, Hannover 1984
Epp.	<i>Epistolae</i> III-VIII (= <i>Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi</i> , Hannover 1892-1939)
Epp. Sel.	<i>Epistolae Selectae in usum scholarum</i> , 5 vols., Hannover 1897-91
Formulae	<i>Formulae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi</i> , ed. K. Zeumer, <i>Legum Sectio V</i> , Hannover 1886
LNG	<i>Leges nationum Germanicarum</i>
Poet. Lat.	<i>Poetae Latini Aevi Karolini</i> , ed. E. Dümmler, L. Traube, P. von Winterfeld and K. Strecker, 4 vols., Hannover 1881-99
SRG	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> , 63 vols., Hannover 1871-1987
SRM	<i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i> , ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, 7 vols., Hannover 1885-1920
SS	<i>Scriptores in-folio</i> , 30 vols., Hannover 1824-1924
Migne PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols., Paris 1857-66
Migne PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols., Paris 1841-64
MIÖG	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
MMS	<i>Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften</i>
NA	<i>Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Geschichtsforschung</i>
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts
RAM	<i>Revue d'ascétique et de mystique</i>
RBen	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
RB	<i>Regula Benedicti</i>
RDC	<i>Revue de droit canonique</i>

<i>RGG</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue historique</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
<i>RHEF</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire de l'Église en France</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Regula Magistri</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
<i>StMon</i>	<i>Studia Monastica</i>
<i>StMBO</i>	Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner- Ordens und seiner Zweige
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>ZKTh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZRG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>Germ. Abt.</i>	<i>Germanistische Abteilung</i>
<i>Kan. Abt</i>	<i>Kanonistische Abteilung</i>



## INTRODUCTION

Child oblation was generally accepted and widely practised in the early medieval West. The consecration of a child, be it a boy or a girl, was a religious act: the child was offered to God as a living sacrifice. The Rule of Benedict furnished the ritual framework for child oblation, ordering that parents hand over their son at the altar. The *puer oblatus* was to hold the eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, his right hand enveloped in the altar cloth. Thus, the child was to be offered 'to God in the monastery', committed for life to the vows his parents made for him. The biblical source of inspiration for this ritual was the story of Hannah, who offered her son Samuel at the temple, to be raised for the Lord's service (1 Sam. 1, 24-28). Together with Benedict's Rule, this irrevocable form of child oblation gained ground in the early medieval kingdoms, to the extent that the majority of new recruits to monastic life entered religious institutions in childhood. Child oblation was to remain virtually unchallenged until the late eleventh century, when monastic leaders tentatively began to express their dismay about the involuntary aspect of the proceedings, questioning the suitability of monks and nuns who might have been forced into the monastery against their wishes. Gradually, criticism swelled to a chorus, turning a once flourishing institution into a remnant of the past. By the end of the twelfth century a new consensus had grown: once they had reached the age of discretion, child oblates had the right to leave the monastic community. Parental vows, therefore, were no longer binding.

As one Benedictine scholar expressed it, historical research into early medieval child oblation has been fraught with 'retrospective uneasiness'.<sup>1</sup> From the seventeenth century onwards scholars disagreed on two matters: had Benedict really intended the parental oblation to be irrevocable, and, if so, did parents have the right to commit their children to monastic life? The Maurists Hugues Ménard (1585-1664) and Edmond Martène (1654-1739) answered both questions in a positive sense, as did the great scholar Jean Mabillon

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<sup>1</sup> Delatte, *Commentaire*, p. 469.



(1632-1702). Their arguments were of a polemical nature, defending the good intentions and natural rights of medieval parents. After all, Ménard said, child oblation was not that different from baptism, through which parents committed their children to Christianity without ever having consulted them.<sup>2</sup>

Such discussions largely remained an internal affair of learned monks, commenting in passing upon something they often encountered in their study of medieval manuscripts. The first full-length monograph treating the matter appeared in 1871, when the German theologian Johann Nepomuk Seidl published his 'canonical and moral evaluation' of child oblation. He agreed with his predecessors that the parental vows had been irrevocable since Benedict, but considered this a morally indefensible aberration produced by Roman law and its concept of *patria potestas*. Whereas Benedict had still belonged to this Roman world, the later medieval criticism of child oblation had grown out of an ever-increasing sense of Germanic freedom. Once children were given the right to confirm or deny the vows of their parents, as was the case since the late twelfth century, nothing was wrong with child oblation.<sup>3</sup>

Seidl in fact attempted to exonerate the medieval church from blame for having obstructed the basic human right of free choice: medieval clerics had been compelled to adapt themselves to customs prevailing in lay society. This apologetic tone is absent in two articles which the Benedictine scholar J.-P. Deroux devoted to the matter. He viewed child oblation as an act of 'puissance paternelle', first and foremost; its religious aspects came second.<sup>4</sup> With his dissertation published in 1939, however, his fellow-Benedictine Joseph Riepenhoff took the debate back to the realm of apology, stating that Benedict had never intended to deny child oblates a choice of their own. He

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<sup>2</sup> Ménard, *Observationes*, col. 1306; Martène, *Commentarius*, col. 844-8; Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta*, p. 63. This consensus was shared by Calmet, *Commentarius*, p. 247; Magnanotti, *De antiquo ritu*, p. 339; Thomassin, *Vetus et nova ecclesiae disciplina*, c. 56, nos. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Seidl, *Die Gott-Verlobung*, pp. 174-88.

<sup>4</sup> Deroux, 'Les origines', pp. 3-5; in a similar vein, Leclercq, art. 'Oblat', cols. 857-67. Schröteler's treatment of the matter was understandably less dispassionate, however; defending Roman-Catholic views on parental authority against nazi propaganda, he made a plea for medieval parents' right to donate their children. Cf. Schröteler, *Das Elternrecht*, pp. 35-122.

argued that Benedict's chapter on child oblation was in fact dependent upon Basil's Rule, which had indeed granted oblate children who wished to leave the monastery in adulthood the opportunity to depart.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Benedict meant to give children a choice, but subsequent generations had misinterpreted his intentions. Riepenhoff's approach is reminiscent of Seidl's: provided child oblation was revocable, both scholars deeply approved of the institution.<sup>6</sup> But they differed in their judgment of the evil influences which had distorted a basically beneficial practice. Whereas Seidl pointed accusingly at Roman law, Riepenhoff blamed the convergence of parental and monastic interests in the Carolingian age. Parents wished to honour their vows, while religious institutions eagerly recruited new members; hence, the freedom of the oblates was sacrificed to practical considerations.<sup>7</sup>

Riepenhoff's gallant defence of his order's founder is interesting, for it shows to what extent child oblation has been – and, perhaps, still is – an object of 'retrospective uneasiness'. His arguments did not convince the scholarly world,<sup>8</sup> but neither did child oblation become an attractive research topic to the learned monks who still dominated monastic history. Even after 1945 there was a decided tendency to shy away from the whole matter, an aversion best exemplified by Dom David Knowles in his history of English monasticism. Though acknowledging the importance of child oblation for monastic recruitment, he only accorded it a few pages in his extensive study, deeming it a practice befitting 'the early centuries or backward countries of monastic life'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Riepenhoff, *Zur Frage des Ursprungs*, pp. 43-91.

<sup>6</sup> Seidl, *Die Gott-Verlobung*, pp. 174-9; Riepenhoff, *Zur Frage des Ursprungs*, pp. 378-81.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 336-55.

<sup>8</sup> The only moderately positive reaction was that of Herwegen, *Sinn und Geist*, p. 352. Ph. Oppenheim remained sceptical in his review for *Theologische Revue* 39 (1940), p. 65-7. After the war Riepenhoff's thesis was taken to pieces in two articles: Stegemann, 'Die Verbindlichkeit der Oblation' (esp. pp. 126-33) and Lentine, 'Note sull'oblazione'. Figueras, *De impedimentis*, altogether ignored Riepenhoff's views.

<sup>9</sup> Knowles, *The Monastic Order*, p. 9; see also *ibid.*, pp. 418-22. An exception is Figueras, who gave an excellent survey of the relevant legal sources in his *De impedimentis* (1957); given the fact that this dissertation was published in Latin it did not gain a wide audience, however.

Obviously, embarrassment was not a frame of mind conducive to in-depth study of early medieval *oblatio puerorum*. Interest in this practice could only flourish in a more dispassionate climate: an ongoing process of secularisation has allowed medieval historians to view the symbolic systems of their own past in terms of distance and otherness, instead of as an object of confessional apology or anti-clerical criticism. Formerly the territory of 'church history', Christianity now became a central concern to general medieval historians.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, this revived interest in the domain of the religious coincided with a loss of first-hand knowledge of traditional religious practice on the part of historians; those studying the oblation ritual now had to search their way through the intricacies of the early medieval mass.<sup>11</sup>

Publications from a 'lay' perspective started emerging only in the 1970s. Joseph Lynch called attention to the debate on child oblation that started in the late eleventh centuries, and to the persistence of this practice, even within monastic orders which officially refused to accept children.<sup>12</sup> My own dissertation on 'Child and cloister in the early middle ages' (1986) situated the offering of children firmly in a religious context, attempting to steer clear of apology and criticism alike. Published in Dutch, this book had only a limited impact.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For an informative discussion of this development, see Van Engen, 'The Christian Middle Ages'.

<sup>11</sup> When responding to a review by Eugene Vance, Brian Stock admirably summed up this dilemma: 'In my view, a symbolically important break occurred when the Church abandoned Latin Mass. However, once the divorce between medieval and modern culture was complete, it was possible to look upon the Latin Middle Ages and its European literary continuation as an alien culture in much the same way that an anthropologist looks upon non-western societies (...). The alterity of the Middle Ages is an indisputed fact. It is also an advantage: for, once the distance between medieval and modern culture is acknowledged, it is advantageous to think of a perspective that is both anthropological and historical, to adopt a position that is comparative and not simply hierarchical; and, above all, to see discontinuities as well as continuities ...'. Cf. Stock, 'Afterthoughts', p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lynch, 'The Cistercians and Under-age Novices' (1973); idem, 'Monastic recruitment in the eleventh and twelfth centuries' (1975); Lynch also discussed oblation in his *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life* (1976). In the early 1980s: De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery' (1983); Boswell, '*Expositio* and *Oblatio*' (1984).

<sup>13</sup> De Jong, *Kind en klooster*; cf. also eadem, 'In Samuel's image: child oblation and the Rule of St. Benedict in the early Middle Ages (600-900)'.

Best known, also to the public at large, is John Boswell's *The Kindness of Strangers* (1988). Here child oblation is presented as a humane form of abandonment, but as abandonment all the same. The main reason for parents to give away their children 'to God in the monastery' was their inability to support their offspring. That they could do so for ostensibly religious and honourable reasons made it easier for them, but *oblatio* nonetheless remained a form of *expositio*. There is a strong sense of moral indignation in Boswell's book: children were robbed of their freedom to lead a life of their own, even more so than exposed children who were reared as slaves, for these, after all, could engage in erotic relationships.<sup>14</sup>

Boswell's views reflect contemporary sensibilities. How could parents do this to their children? A 'rational' explanation lies close to hand: they did so because they were driven by economic necessity. Consequently, the overt religious motivation suggested by early medieval sources is treated as the pious sauce to a rather unpalatable dish. There is much to be said against this interpretation of child oblation, not least from an economic point of view. The evidence that oblates were predominantly aristocratic children who brought their inheritance with them to the monastery speaks against the whole argument of economic necessity. But this is not the main objection against perceiving child oblation as a kind of religiously-disguised family planning. The methodological flaw is two-fold: jumping to commonsensical and therefore anachronistic explanations of seemingly inexplicable phenomena, and disbelieving medieval authors on principle whenever they happen to offer 'religious' explanations.

Child oblation has remained controversial. Patricia Quinn's study of early medieval monastic education (1989) is apologetic rather than critical, depicting the monastery as a paradise for little oblates cherished by their loving masters.<sup>15</sup> A more sensitive and in-depth treatment of child oblation can be found in Maria Lahaye-Geusen's study

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<sup>14</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 242-4. See also *ibid.*, p. 306: 'The most poignant aspect of their [i.e. the child oblates'] lives was the concerted effort of monastic authorities to prevent any expression of affection or warmth to them by the older monks, or even among themselves'.

<sup>15</sup> Quinn, *Better than the sons of kings*. Another problem with this book is that its author seems to have relied mostly on translated sources.

of monastic *consuetudines* from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup> Her book avoids apology as well as indignation, providing a careful analysis of children's lives within the cloister. Nonetheless, this 'view from within' poses some problems as well. What are we to do with notions such as 'the early medieval aversion to genuinely Christian conceptions, especially in the domain of sacrificial theology',<sup>17</sup> or the 'ethical purity' of the New Testament as opposed to the 'formally cultic aspects of purity' of the early middle ages?<sup>18</sup> In spite of her sympathetic approach – or perhaps because of it – the author is caught up in the dichotomy between 'real' Christianity and its 'archaic' early medieval counterpart, which presumably should be classified as primitive religion rather than as true Christianity.

Early medieval child oblation belongs to a past that has become a foreign country. The process of alienation has a respectable pedigree; to a large extent, modern sensibilities are rooted in the later medieval consensus concerning the voluntary nature of monastic profession. Along with the ordeal, the irrevocable gift of a child now seems to be the epitome of otherness. Boswell and Lahaye-Geusen represent two opposite ways of dealing with the problem of otherness: denying its existence on the one hand, and overstressing it on the other. The problem is by no means easy, and I am not making a plea for any single 'objective' treatment of child oblation. Parents giving away their young children are very hard to understand in the late twentieth-century West, and any modern historian will naturally have misgivings about it. Little comfort is offered by explanations in terms of children having a better life in the monastery than outside of it, or

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<sup>16</sup> Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*. The title plays upon the two meanings of child oblation put forward in her book: children being a sacrifice as well as making one themselves through devoting their life to God's service.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16: 'Natürlich sind die unmittelbaren Vorbilder der benediktinischen *oblatio puerorum* zunächst in einem alttestamentlichen und dann christlichen Kontext zu suchen, aber die frühmittelalterliche Abkehr von genuin christlichen Vorstellungen gerade im Bereich der Opfertheologie, die ja die Kinderabbringung entscheidend mit beeinflusst hat, zwingt dazu, auf Parallelen zu vorchristlich-heidnischen Zuständen aufmerksam zu machen'.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25: 'Im Neuen Testament wurde in Frontstellung zu den Gesetzen des Alten Bundes noch der Schwerpunkt auf die ethische Reinheit gelegt. Der Aufstieg des monastischen Klerus hingegen erklärt sich aus einer Rückwendung auf die formal-kultischen Aspekte von Reinheit, gleichbedeutend mit Freiheit von sexueller Betätigung'.

parental love being a modern invention. There is evidence of child oblates having suffered under the constraints of the cloister,<sup>19</sup> and of genuine grief on the part of parents and children when they were parted.<sup>20</sup> So the obvious question is: why did parents do it? Faced with a lack of sources articulating the parents' own voice, the gift of a child has been explained either in terms of calculated self-interest or as a manifestation of the 'cultic' and therefore inherently reciprocal nature of early medieval religion. According to the latter view, the principle of *quid pro quo* governed relations between mankind and the supernatural: all gifts, including those of children, were made with the expectation of divine reward. On the surface these explanations seem radically different, for the first tends to play down the role of religious motivation, while the second is based on the intrinsic otherness of early medieval religious mentalities. Both, however, predicate on the same conception of the ideal gift: it should be given without any expectation of reward other than salvation in the hereafter.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the manifest reciprocity of early medieval gifts to the sacred has been perceived as an 'archaic' deviation from the norm of 'real' Christianity, which is of free giving; conversely, its equally-obvious disinterested aspects are denounced as an ideological cover-up.

Any treatment of early medieval child oblation should start from the assumption that it was precisely what sources claimed: a gift to God. This is not to say that extraneous motives played no part, or that clerical authors never indulged in over-emphasising parental piety and filial obedience. But the widespread practice of donating children can only be explained in the context of a society which considered gift-giving a pivotal strategy for building social relationships and communicating with the supernatural. The gift of a child was irrevocable precisely because it was a sacrifice, not to be rescinded if the donor or the oblate happened to change his mind. New ideas in clerical circles posed a challenge to this 'société du don' from the eleventh-century onwards, producing crucial changes in the perception of child

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<sup>19</sup> See for example the story of St Gall's Wolo, who climbed the church tower to see the fields where he could not walk; his fall to death has been interpreted as a suicide. Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Galli*, cc. 42-4, pp. 98-100, sensitively interpreted by Haefele, 'Wolo cecidit'.

<sup>20</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, XIII, c. 45, p. 554.

<sup>21</sup> See Parry, 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the "Indian Gift"'; these issues are discussed more extensively below, in chapter VIII, § 1.

oblation; the duty of parents – once self-understood – to give their children to God was now increasingly offset by the conviction that religious life should result from a personal vocation. Once such ideas gained acceptance, complaints of parents dumping unwanted children started to multiply. The twelfth century therefore was not the 'zenith' of child oblation, as Boswell has it, but rather the period which saw the beginning of the end of an ancient practice, grounded in the Old Testament.<sup>22</sup>

The Old Testament was the paramount textual source of inspiration for early medieval child oblation. It also legitimated the endeavour of Carolingian leadership, secular and ecclesiastic, to forge the realm of the Franks into a New Israel. Parents should offer their children, for this had been prescribed in the 'old law' pertaining to God's elect, be they Israelites or Franks.<sup>23</sup> Old Testament notions permeated ninth-century law and liturgy as yeast pervades bread: they inspired the rites of consecration of priests, kings and churches, the keeping of the Sunday, the levying of tithes and the use of unleavened bread in mass.<sup>24</sup> Kings compared themselves to Joshua, David and Solomon, and Charlemagne's courtiers were nicknamed Aaron, Samuel and Nathaniel.<sup>25</sup> Reading Carolingian letter collections means stepping into a world which perceived itself as living in a spatial and temporal continuum with Israel. Kings clamoured for biblical commentary to see them through the perils of their times, and those responding to their demands looked for practical guidance in the *vetus lex*.<sup>26</sup> A self-assured episcopate likened itself to the priestly caste of Israel, defending sacerdotal rights (*ius sacerdotum*) to the

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<sup>22</sup> Berend, 'La subversion invisible'; Doran, 'Oblation or obligation?'

<sup>23</sup> Cf. De Jong, 'Old law and new-found power'. As for the role of the Old Testament in the oblation ritual, see below, chapter V. Around 840, Hildemar of Corbie/Civate had parents offering their children pronounce the following formula: 'I wish to hand over my son to the Almighty God, to serve Him in this monastery, since the Lord prescribed in the law of the children of Israel that they should dedicate their offspring to God'. Cf. Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 549.

<sup>24</sup> Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testaments*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36; about Old Testament conceptions shaping early medieval kingship, see Ewig, 'Zum christlichen Königsgedanken'; Werner, '*Hludovicus Augustus*'; Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy'; eadem, 'Kingship and empire'.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Werner, 'Gott, Herrscher und Historiograph'; De Jong, 'Old law and new-found power'.

gifts of the faithful with scores of Old Testament texts;<sup>27</sup> humbler priests avidly perused the old law too, wondering why their predecessors had been allowed to marry while they were not.<sup>28</sup> The Old Testament was a mirror constantly being held up to the faces of those wielding power: kings should familiarise themselves with the Book of Kings, and judges with the Book of Judges.<sup>29</sup> Even political conflict had biblical overtones. When Hincmar crossed swords with Charles the Bald over church property, he perceived himself as Nathan withstanding David's might.<sup>30</sup> This was the world to which child oblation belonged. For Hrabanus Maurus, Benedict's instructions for the oblation ritual were nothing short of a faithful execution of biblical precept.

The growing influence of the Old Testament on early medieval – and especially Carolingian – law has been acknowledged and well researched.<sup>31</sup> But what exactly does 'influence' mean? The reception of older practice is never self-evident, and the fact that Carolingian society was a Christian one does not in itself account for its reliance on the Old Testament. Moreover, certain books were favoured over others, notably the Pentateuch and the historical ones such as Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles. The latter informed the rulers of the New Israel about the deeds of their predecessors, while the Pentateuch was the main source of 'old law'. When Hrabanus Maurus referred to the Old Testament, he spoke of the *lex divina*, as opposed to the *evangelica auctoritas* of the Gospels.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously, principles of selection were at work. From an exegetical perspective, the New Testament was the fulfilment of the Old, and therefore vastly superior, but when it came to legal and ritual

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<sup>27</sup> *Epistola ... ad Pippinum regem directa*, MHG Capit. II, pp. 725-67.

<sup>28</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare II*, c. 4, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, nos. 18 and 27, pp. 423 and 442; De Jong, 'Old law and new-found power', pp. 162-3.

<sup>30</sup> Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy', pp. 148-54; De Jong, 'Power and humility', p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> See especially Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testaments*; a substantial amount of evidence had already been gathered by Browe in his *Beiträge zur Sexualethik des Mittelalters*.

<sup>32</sup> Writing on incest in 847-856, Hrabanus distinguished between the *lex divina*, the *auctoritas evangelica* and the *sancti patres* as the three elements of sacred tradition. Cf. Hrabanus, *Epistolae* no. 53, p. 507; De Jong, 'Old law and new-found power'.



prescriptions, the Gospels had precious little to offer compared with the Pentateuch. It was with regard to law and liturgy that biblical scholars like Hrabanus scrutinised the Old Testament, searching for juridical and cultic models. This did not necessarily imply servile imitation; on the contrary, biblical precept was creatively adapted to contemporary perceptions and needs. Carolingian anti-incest legislation, for example, far exceeded biblical lists of forbidden kindred; these lists did not include first cousins of the same generation, who were an absolute taboo in the eyes of Frankish legislators. Nonetheless, they treated Leviticus as the legitimate foundation of their far-reaching decrees against forbidden unions.<sup>33</sup>

This preference for the Old Testament has been explained in terms of a fundamental similarity between early medieval religiosity and its Old Testament counterpart. Carolingian society was indeed a 'cultic' one, in that public ritual was a matter of intense political concern. Much of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance was about *correctio*: performing the correct liturgy in the correct manner, and inducing the *populus christianus* to live according to the correct precepts.<sup>34</sup> The efficacy of ritual depended upon its proper and unified performance, which was laid down in sacred texts; hence the striving for one biblical text, one monastic rule and one ceremony of mass – in other words, one single law for the New Israel. This was the fertile soil in which the cultic and legalistic elements of the Old Testament could take root, meaning that a particular society recognised itself in a specific part of sacred tradition. 'Old Testament influence' presupposes that those allowing themselves to be influenced perceive an analogy between their own situation and the one presented in their model. In other words, a sense of affinity – which in this case was amply met – is a prerequisite. Basic features of Frankish society were mirrored in the Old Testament. Kings and their subjects were held responsible by a vengeful and demanding deity in both the old Israel and the new, and a priestly caste mediated between God and mankind. A constant stream of offerings served to retain divine favour, or to give satisfaction if God had been offended. Military defeat caused

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<sup>33</sup> Particularly Lv 18, 5-20; cf. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 220-1; De Jong, 'To the limits of kinship', pp. 38-9.

<sup>34</sup> Contreni, 'The Carolingian Renaissance', pp. 62-3; Brown, 'Introduction: the Carolingian Renaissance'. pp. 11-28.

cosmological catastrophes, and strife in the royal household cast its shadow over the realm in the shape of plagues and warfare. When Louis the Pious regained his throne in 834, storms subsided and rivers returned to their beds again: the fate of kings and the events of nature were interconnected, as they were in the Books of Kings.<sup>35</sup>

Veneration for the *lex divina* may have reinforced such cosmological perceptions, but they certainly were not created purely by reading or hearing of the Old Testament. It was a matter of elective affinity, based on a perceived similarity and continuity between the biblical past and the present. Carolingian political propagandists made the most of this perspective, extolling the position of the Franks as the New Israel. It was not a matter of 'mere propaganda', however, for such ideological strategies can only be successful if some basic assumptions are shared by the recipients of the message. One of these assumptions was the interconnectedness of the deeds of the mighty with society and nature; hence, the seemingly 'political' actions of kings became disproportionately magnified, causing subjects as well as rivers to respond to their fate. Another one is that of a God capable of being scandalised into wrath and vengeance. Elective affinity being selective indeed, it was the God of the Pentateuch who dominated early medieval Christianity. This befitted a society pervaded by warrior ethics, in which Christ figured as an omnipotent king and judge instead of the all too human Man of Sorrows. A third assumption was that of good law being ancient law. Whether it was transmitted orally or in writing, it derived its authority from linking the past and the present, having been handed down over generations.<sup>36</sup> The more ancient and venerable the law, the more crucial it became to obey all its precepts to the letter. Apart from being divine law, the Old Testament also outranked all other legal texts when it came to antiquity.

These assumptions are not particularly Frankish, and there is certainly no reason to explain the rise of such legalistic and cultic attitudes in terms of 'Germanic' influence; similar tendencies are already clearly discernible in sixth-century sources originating from the Mediterranean. Pope Gregory the Great – never a stickler for

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<sup>35</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 834, p. 22; about 'interconnected cosmologies', see Oudemans and Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity*, pp. 48-81.

<sup>36</sup> Krygier, 'Law as tradition'.

cultic purity – castigated his Roman flock for their rigid observance of the Sunday, accusing them of ‘judaising’ and exhorting them to celebrate the Lord’s day in a more spiritual fashion.<sup>37</sup> In a similar vein, Spanish bishops rose up in arms against the so-called ‘Sunday letters’ purporting to have come from Christ himself, and denounced those who argued for strict observance as ‘judaisers’. Such official reactions were very different in spirit from those of Carolingian legislators, who produced detailed prescriptions for Sunday observance of the type their predecessors had condemned.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, those who had once been accused of judaising, meaning an overly literal and legalistic interpretation of Scripture, had won the day.

The complex history of this cultural transformation falls outside the scope of this book; but it deserves some attention, for the development of child oblation was one of its aspects. Already in mid-sixth-century Italy, Benedict presented the offering of children to God as an irrevocable sacrifice: the efficacy of the ritual once and for all precluded the child’s return to the world. Old Testament models rather than Roman law were the source of inspiration for Benedict’s celebrated oblation precept, and his monastic rule shared his society’s preoccupation with proper ritual. When such long-standing tendencies ultimately culminated in the liturgical endeavour labelled the ‘Carolingian Renaissance’, the mechanism of selective affinity elevated Benedict’s rule to a position of supremacy. In the process, child oblation gained priority over personal profession, ‘since the Lord prescribed in the law for the children of Israel that they should dedicate their offspring to God’.<sup>39</sup>

As Joseph Lynch remarked, ‘in this general atmosphere of reviving Old Testament norms, the concern with incest becomes comprehensible’.<sup>40</sup> The same goes for child oblation, which was also integral part of divine law. Those wishing to obey God’s precepts, and especially those proclaiming themselves to be the New Israel,

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<sup>37</sup> Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, XIII, 3 (Sept. 603), pp. 367-8.

<sup>38</sup> *Admonitio generalis* (789), c. 81, MGH Capit. I, p. 61, starting with the following pronouncement: ‘Statuimus quod et in lege Dominus praecepit, ut opera servilia diebus dominicis non agantur ...’. Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testamentes*, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 549: ‘... quia sic precepit Dominus in lege filiis Israel, ut offerrent filios suos Deo ...’.

<sup>40</sup> Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, p. 221.

should therefore give up their children. This was only one side of the picture, however. Although the sacrificial principle underlying child oblation was of crucial significance to early medieval societies, the voices of dissent were never entirely silenced. The ideal of a personal religious vocation had its defenders even in an age when monasteries were filled with oblates; after all, it remained present in the legacy of ancient and authoritative texts constantly inspiring monastic life and reform. When dealing with early medieval sacrifice in general – or child oblation in particular – one should therefore be extremely careful with qualifications such as ‘archaic’ or ‘archaising’,<sup>41</sup> not only because of the implication that the sacrifice of children is somehow alien to Christianity,<sup>42</sup> but also to avoid simplifying one’s image of early medieval cultures. After all, powerful subcurrents counteracted prevailing consensus about so-called ‘archaic’ practice, ranging from the legitimacy of ordeals to the irrevocability of child oblation. Such subcurrents became mainstream thinking from the early twelfth century onwards, which is not to say that older perceptions vanished overnight. Parental vows were no longer binding, but well into the modern era the obligation to give up at least one child to God’s service remained a powerful one to many Roman Catholic parents, as well as an essential source of recruitment for the clergy.

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<sup>41</sup> Angenendt, *Das Frühmittelalter*, p. 45: ‘Indem aber das frühe Mittelalter in der Antike ausgeformte Gedanken, Institutionen, Handlungsweisen und Vorstellungen rezipierte – wenn auch oft nur teilweise oder gerade noch halbverstanden –, so bleibt dabei doch die Möglichkeit gegeben, das Rezipierte in seiner ursprünglichen Bedeutung wiederzugewinnen bzw. der ursprünglichen Bedeutung wiederzugewinnen bzw. der ursprünglichen Bedeutung wenigstens anzunähern. Es ist das Problem der “Renaissancen” des Mittelalters. Um das Frühmittelalter insgesamt zu kennzeichnen, wird es darum kaum genügen, einfachhin von einem “archaischen Zeitalter” zu sprechen. Unbestreitbar sind indes einzelne archaische Züge, so dass zu erwägen wäre, das Frühmittelalter ein “archaisierendes” zu nennen’.

<sup>42</sup> As Janet L. Nelson put it: ‘There is a danger in that term of suggesting something pre- and even un-Christian, hence that the Church was accommodating something alien to it. Early medieval Christianity need not be seen as in some ways compromised, or debased, by accepting, as with oblation, the magicality of the sacrificial gift that expects a return. (If it is seen thus, then Christianity has been, and still is, compromised in the understanding of most of its practitioners)’. Cf. Nelson, ‘Parents, children and the church’, p. 109, in discussion with Angenendt, *Das Frühmittelalter*, pp. 43-5. This question was explored during a colloquium on ‘Religion and Power in the Early Middle Ages’ held in 1993 at the NIAS (Wassenaar, The Netherlands).

Surely the need to sacrifice was not peculiar to the earlier middle ages; still, in that particular period in Western history the principle of gift-giving assumed an overriding importance, of which irrevocable child oblation was but one aspect.

This book attempts to provide an outline of the rise of the *oblatio puerorum* in early medieval societies in the West, but it concentrates on child oblation's elaboration and consolidation within the Carolingian kingdoms. It was within the Carolingian world that child oblation reached its zenith, remaining virtually unchallenged until the age of the Gregorian reforms. In other words, this book is not intended as a definitive treatment of child oblation. Many important topics still await further investigation: the consecration of children in Antiquity, the comparison between Christian child oblation and similar practices in other religions, the evidence from the charters and cartularies of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and changing perceptions of child oblation in the later middle ages. My chronological scope is a consciously restricted one, for I am as much interested in the wider context of the *oblatio puerorum* as in the phenomenon itself. Some have therefore suggested that I change my sub-title into something like 'monasticism and society in the early middle ages', but I have decided against this, feeling this would promise more than I can offer. After all, this *is* a book about the theory and practice of child oblation; this topic serves as a strategic window, however, through which both the world within and outside the cloister may be observed.

Historians rarely are in a position to follow the advice of the King of Hearts: 'Begin at the beginning (...) and go on till you come to the end: then stop'.<sup>33</sup> This book does not begin at the beginning, and neither does it stop at the end. Instead, I plunge into a brief survey of child oblation in late Antiquity, rapidly moving on to developments in the Frankish kingdoms. These first two chapters are to provide a factual basis for the rest of the book, which is roughly divided into two parts. The first one is concerned with the internal – i.e. monastic – organisation of child oblation, treating matters such as registration of newcomers, educational practice and the elaboration of an oblation ritual (ch. 3-5); the second part of the books investigates the

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<sup>33</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, p. 158.

ways in which ‘the world’ (*saeculum*), as monks and nuns called it, helped to shape the *oblatio puerorum* in theory and practice (ch. 6-8). In these last chapters, I explore two phenomena which to my mind are of crucial importance to a better understanding of ninth-century child oblation: monastic *stabilitas* and gifts to the sacred. Religious communities were not the only ones who had a vested interest in the stability of child oblates. Given that royal monasteries sustained royal power, the behaviour of *pueri oblati* and the gifts they had brought with them became a political issue.

Admittedly, most of the sources concern monastic concepts of child oblation rather than those of the parents who donated their offspring. When it comes to finding out about the motives and perceptions of those sacrificing their children, the King of Hearts deserves to be cited again: ‘If that’s all you know about it, you may stand down’. But my response to this challenge has been like the one of the Mad Hatter: ‘I can’t go no lower (...) I’m on the floor, as it is’.<sup>34</sup> The social context of child oblation can only be perceived from the modest perspective of someone sitting on the floor, as it were, gleaning bits and pieces of information falling through the cracks of monastic discourse.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CHILD OBLATION: ITS EARLY HISTORY

#### 1. EARLY MONASTICISM

The custom of dedicating children to monastic life is as old as coenobitic monasticism itself. The monastic communities founded by Pachomius (d. 346) in the Nile valley must already have harboured children, for he made them the object of special disciplinary measures.<sup>1</sup> Such communities were obviously better suited for the upbringing of young children than the harsh, individualistic asceticism practised by hermits. The disciples gathered around the desert monks had probably outgrown childhood, for otherwise they would have lacked the physical stamina required for this kind of life. Anthony was between eighteen and twenty years old when he ventured off into the desert, and although his biographer mentions many disciples, there were no children among them.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Egyptian and Syrian hermits were not known for their kindly disposition towards the young. As the lives of the Desert Fathers make eminently clear, youthful beauty was seen as a dangerous temptation, best held at arm's length. Abbot Paphnutio refused to welcome a boy into his vicinity because his face resembled too closely that of a woman,<sup>3</sup> and his colleague Carion found himself maligned by his fellow hermits because he shared his cell with a boy. The fact that this boy happened to be his son did nothing to silence their angry tongues.<sup>4</sup> The story of Carion shows yet another danger resulting from the presence of children in the desert. By bringing along their children or other young members of the family, the hermits were in fact avoiding

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<sup>1</sup> Pachomius, *Regula*, praecepta et instituta, c. 18, p. 60; praecepta atque iudicia, cc. 7 and 13, pp. 66 and 68-9; see Bardy, 'Les Origines', pp. 296-7.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, c. 2, cols. 841-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Apophthegmata patrum*, De abbate Eudemone, col. 175.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, De abbate Carione, cols. 250-1.

the biblical command to cut all worldly ties, including familial ones, in order to follow Christ.<sup>5</sup>

No wonder, then, that Evagrius of Pontus (346-399) believed that hermits would do better to leave the upbringing of young children to coenobitic monks.<sup>6</sup> His contemporary John Chrysostom was an enthusiastic partisan of bringing up children in monasteries; in his apology for monastic life he stressed its important educational functions, going so far as to state that all boys over ten years old should be brought up by monks.<sup>7</sup> Of course not all of these were to become monks themselves, and entrusting one's child to a monastic community did not necessarily mean that he or she had been dedicated to the service of God. Both motives – education and dedication – seem to have inspired parents to give their children into monastic care. Sources indeed mention children being the object of a parental vow, but there seems to have been little formality about their entry into religious life. In this respect, children did not differ from adults, whose entry too was characterised by informality in Pachomius' age. There is no mention of a monastic vow; rather, taking the habit was considered sufficient sign of the passage into monastic life.<sup>8</sup>

The dedication of a child could have various consequences, not all resulting in monastic life. Gregory Nazianzen (d. 390) was dedicated to God immediately after his birth, like his brothers and sisters. He did indeed follow an ecclesiastical career, but he never became a monk.<sup>9</sup> According to Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. c. 466) he himself was even dedicated before his birth; his mother owed her pregnancy to the inter-

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<sup>5</sup> This theme is elaborated upon in *Apophthegmata patrum*, De abbate Sisoë, c. 10, cols. 393-4; *Verba seniorum*, XIV, c. 8 and 18, cols. 949 and 952; John Cassian, *Institutiones*, IV, c. 27, pp. 158-62. See especially Clark, 'The Fathers and the children', pp. 1-3; furthermore, Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, pp. 196-8 and Steidle, 'Das Wiedersehen des Mönchs mit Mutter und Schwester'.

<sup>6</sup> Evagrius of Pontus, *Rerum monachalium rationes*, c. 5, col. 1255.

<sup>7</sup> John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, III, cc. 11 and 18, cols. 366-8 and 379-81. John Chrysostom extensively treated Christian education in his *De inana gloria*, cc. 16-25, pp. 96-112, displaying great optimism about the malleability of young children. About John Chrysostom and children, cf. Clark, 'The Fathers and the children', pp. 19-20, and especially Gould, 'Childhood in Eastern Patristic thought'.

<sup>8</sup> Capelle, *Le voeu d'obéissance*, pp. 34-6.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Orationes*, no. 2, c. 77, col. 484; idem, *Poemata de seipso*, no. 11, cols. 1033-5. See Rousse, 'Grégoire de Nazianze'.



vention of the holy man Macedonius, who demanded that she return the child to God. Macedonius kept her to her promise, only preventing a threatening miscarriage when the woman vowed to keep her side of the bargain. Theodoret remained at home until his thirteenth year; his upbringing in the monasteries of Antioch only started upon the death of his parents.<sup>10</sup> But there were also real benjamins growing up in monastic communities, such as the Syrian Heliodorus who had been part of a 'herd of monks' since he was three years old, and was therefore unable to recognise pigs and roosters when he first encountered them,<sup>11</sup> or Euthymios the Great (d. 477) who was offered by his mother to the metropolitan bishop of Miletos at a similar age.<sup>12</sup> Boys who were vowed to God could apparently enter the secular clergy as well as the monastery, but there is no indication that this was surrounded by any formality.

The first to make more formal provisions was Basil of Caesarea (d. 379). He inspired a kind of monasticism that was far removed from the massive autonomous 'monastic towns' of Pachomius. Many of Basil's foundations were quite small; these 'brotherhoods' were to act as ideal Christian households, dedicated to the care of the poor and the homeless.<sup>13</sup> These included orphans, of course, but Basil's legislation about children entering his monasteries was concerned with boys whose parents were still alive. Parents were allowed to entrust their sons to a monastery, but the actual handing-over could only take place in the presence of witnesses. Any subsequent misunderstanding or scandal should thus be avoided.<sup>14</sup>

Were such children to be bound to monastic life for ever? Basil's instructions are ambiguous on this point. An abbreviated version of his monastic rule became well known in the West through Rufinus' translation.<sup>15</sup> It gives only the above-mentioned prescription that children

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<sup>10</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa*, vol. I, XIII, cc. 16-7, pp. 502-7; cf. Clark, 'The Fathers and the children', pp. 17-8.

<sup>11</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa*, vol. II, XXVI, cc. 4-5, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> Cyrillus, *Vita Euthymii*, c. 1, pp. 666-7; Génier, *Vie de Saint Euthyme*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 289-90; Pargoire, 'S. Basile de Césarée'; Leclercq, 'Monachisme', cols. 1818-9; Cousin, *Précis d'histoire monastique*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>14</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Regula a Rufino Latine versa*, c. 7, p. 39: '... Oportet tamen infantes, voluntate et consensu parentum, sub testimonio plurimorum suscipi; ut omnis occasio maledicti gratia excludatur hominum pessimorum ...'.

<sup>15</sup> Gribomont, *Histoire du texte des Ascétiques de Saint Basile*, pp. 103-5.

should be handed over by their parents in the presence of witnesses, and has therefore become grist to the mill of those who believed child oblation to be irrevocable. The longer version, however, is adamant that only a vow of chastity undertaken in adulthood was irrevocable; moreover, it was only considered valid if it had been made voluntarily and after ample deliberation.<sup>16</sup> Anyone reluctant to take the vow had the right to leave the community, an act which also had to take place in the presence of witnesses. Apparently, children who had grown up in the monastery could also decide to return to the world. In fact, Basil's longer version reveals that they were brought up in a separate area within the monastery; consequently, they were not really part of the community.<sup>17</sup> They were pupils rather than monks. In his influential letter to Amphilochius, Basil deemed the sixteenth or seventeenth year a suitable age for vows of chastity for girls, maintaining that 'it is not proper to consider children's words entirely final in such matters'.<sup>18</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Basil was less circumspect where boys were concerned, for he argued in favour of men making an explicit profession rather than a tacit one whenever they entered the monastery.<sup>19</sup> This careful attitude apparently prevailed in monasteries of the East. The reformer Theodore of Studion (756-826) continued to defend the voluntary nature of the vow, stating that both boys and girls could only take it in puberty.<sup>20</sup> Western monasticism, however, was to take a very different course.

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<sup>16</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae fusius tractatae*, XV, c. 1, cols. 951-4. Cf. Gribomont, *Histoire du texte des Ascétiques de Saint Basile*, pp. 210-7.

<sup>17</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae fusius tractatae*, XV, c. 4, cols. 955-6.

<sup>18</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, vol. II, no. 199, c. 18, p. 108: 'For it is not proper to consider children's words entirely final in such matters, but she who is above sixteen or seventeen years, and is mistress of her faculties, who has been examined carefully and has remained constant and has persisted in her petitions for admittance, should then be enrolled among the virgins, and we should ratify the profession of said virgin, and inexorably punish her violation of it'.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 19, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> Theodore of Studion, *Epistolae*, II, no. 183, cols. 1563-6. Some difference of opinion remained, however, concerning the appropriate age for monastic vows. The council *In Trullo* (692) warned against an overly hasty acceptance of new monks; whoever entered the monastery should do so after diligent soul-searching and should be at least ten years old. The age limit of sixteen to seventeen years is mentioned here, but only in relation to the vows of maidens dedicating themselves to God. *Concilium in Trullo* (692), c. 40, Mansi IX, cols. 962-3.

The West soon began developing its own ascetic-monastic tradition, stimulated by a lively interest in Eastern traditions. The desert dwellers of Egypt and Syria attracted fascinated travellers from the West, while those who stayed at home eagerly read the travelogues.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, circumstances forced a number of pioneering ecclesiastical leaders into a kind of ambassadorial role. In 339 the patriarch Athanasius, author of the *Vita Antonii*, took up residence in Rome after having been exiled from Alexandria for the second time; his successor Peter came to Rome in 373. Ten years later Jerome settled in the city, setting himself the task of enlightening a circle of aristocratic Roman ladies and girls about Eastern ascetic ideals. In 397, after years spent in Egypt and Syria, Rufinus also returned to Rome, to devote himself to translating key ascetic texts from Greek into Latin.<sup>22</sup> Thus, within a short period Rome was flooded with fresh information on asceticism as practised in the East. Meanwhile monastic leaders such as Hilary of Poitiers, John Cassian and Martin of Tours had arisen in Gaul. Cassian in particular was a bridge between East and West, providing the embryonic monastic life in Gaul with models derived from Egypt.<sup>23</sup> His influence can hardly be overestimated; in Benedict's list of essential monastic reading Cassian's *Collationes* come second only to Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

The consecration of children features early also in circles of budding Western monasticism. In Jerome's correspondence with Roman ladies we encounter little Asella, consecrated before her birth to God and dedicated to virginity at the age of ten,<sup>25</sup> and Paula, also consecrated by her mother Laeta before she was born.<sup>26</sup> In Gaul, the prefect Arborius offered his daughter to Martin for consecration after the saint had cured her.<sup>27</sup> Not only girls were dedicated to God's service: Bishop Paulinus of Nola (d. 431) in one of his poems celebrated a boy who, like Samuel, grew up in the temple of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> To the Hispano-Roman Prudentius (d. c. 405) child oblation had become something of

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<sup>21</sup> Rousseau, *Ascetics*, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-2.

<sup>23</sup> Guy, *Jean Cassien*; Rousseau, *Ascetics*, pp. 169-234.

<sup>24</sup> *RB*, c. 73, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Jerome, *Epistolae*, vol. I, no. 24, c. 2, p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, no. 107, cc. 3 and 6, pp. 293 and 298. About Jerome and his circle of Roman female devotees, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 369-74.

<sup>27</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, c. 19, 1, p. 292.

<sup>28</sup> Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, no. 24, vv. 499-528 and 589-94, pp. 223 and 226.

an established custom, certainly among prominent citizens, for he sang the praises of the many *nobiles* who had taken a vow to donate their children to God.<sup>29</sup>

By that time, the consecration of children was sufficiently established to become the target of abuse, especially where girls were concerned. Basil and Jerome already sharply criticised parents who forced their less attractive daughters into a life of virginity, dismissing them with a meagre dowry in order to preserve the patrimony for their more marriageable children.<sup>30</sup> A generation later, Salvian of Marseille (d. c. 480) voiced a similar complaint: parents of *oblati* (boys and girls) wickedly deprived their consecrated children of financial means, to the advantage of their brothers and sisters who remained in the world.<sup>31</sup>

These critical remarks have been taken as proof of predominantly avaricious motives for child oblation, causing profound uneasiness within the church itself.<sup>32</sup> Even so, these authors in no way reproached parents for committing their children to a life in God's service. Their censure was directed at excesses and abuses, not at the practice itself. Jerome made it clear to Laeta that she had undertaken heavy obligations when she vowed Paula to God. She should bring up her daughter with extreme care, for anyone offering a tainted sacrifice (*hostia maculata*) to God was guilty of blasphemy. If she felt unable to preserve Paula's virginity in her own home, she should have her brought up in a convent, far from Rome's corrupting influence.<sup>33</sup> Apart from stressing the irrevocability of the vow, Jerome's letter shows that in his day the consecration of a girl was not necessarily followed by her oblation to a monastery. Parents might do so if they wished, but they could just as well raise their daughter at home. Probably most of the unfortunate girls forced into virginity were also meant to stay at home, for many women lived an

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<sup>29</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, II, vv. 521-4: 'videmus inlustres domos/sexu ex utroque nobiles/offerre votis pignera/clarissimorum liberum ...'.

<sup>30</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, vol. II, no. 199, c. 18, pp. 108-9: 'For parents, and brothers and other relatives bring forward many girls before the proper age, not because the girls have in inner urge towards celibacy, but in order that their relatives may provide some worldly advantage for themselves. Such should not be received readily, until we shall have clearly examined their personal inclination'. About the 'meagre dowry' see Jerome, *Epistolae*, vol. III, no. 130, c. 6, p. 182.

<sup>31</sup> Salvianus, *Timothei ad ecclesiam libri IV*, lib. III, c. 4, p. 146.

<sup>32</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 241, 257

<sup>33</sup> Jerome, *Epistolae*, vol. II, no. 107, cc. 4, pp. 293-5; the expression '*hostia maculata*' is used in *ibid.*, c. 6, p. 298.

ascetic life within the family circle.<sup>34</sup> As Peter Brown put it, female asceticism grew out of the Christian household, both in terms of the family reaping the spiritual benefits and the consecrated daughters remaining within its fold.<sup>35</sup> With men things were different: Basil of Caesarea recognised no male asceticism outside the monastery, and preferred monks to make a public profession so they could be punished properly whenever they left their community.<sup>36</sup> Clearly male asceticism became synonymous with monasticism at an early stage, while women could still lead a life of virginity within the parental household. This pattern persisted well into the Middle Ages; there were house-nuns, but certainly no house-monks.<sup>37</sup> Hence, one should be careful to generalise about girls on the basis of sources concerning boys; whereas the *oblatio puerorum* became thoroughly institutionalised, with parents relinquishing authority over their offspring, such was not necessarily the case with girls.<sup>38</sup>

In fifth-century monasticism the procedure for the oblation of boys was not yet clearly defined, however. The group of early rules influenced by the monastery of Lérins are silent about the children growing up in the community, with the exception of the so-called *Regula Orientalis*, written before the last decade of the fifth century.<sup>39</sup> This rule warned monks against excessive laughter and intimacy with the *pueri*;<sup>40</sup> apparently boys were part of the community, but neither their

<sup>34</sup> Metz, *La consécration des vierges*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 263; see his excellent chapter on the 'Daughters of Jerusalem', *ibid.*, pp. 259-84.

<sup>36</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, vol. II, no. 199, c. 19, pp. 110-1: 'But we do not recognize the professions of men except such as have enrolled themselves in the order of monks; these seem to have taken up celibacy in silence. Yet even as regards them I think that the following course of action should precede; they should be questioned and a clear profession received from them, so that whenever they return to the life of the flesh and pleasure they may undergo the punishment of fornicators'.

<sup>37</sup> Nelson, 'Parents, children and the church', p. 110.

<sup>38</sup> With thanks to Jinty Nelson for confronting me with facts staring me in the face.

<sup>39</sup> This text is still the subject of controversy: according to De Vogüé, *Les Règles des Saints Pères*, vol. II, pp. 439-54, this rule originated after the *Regula Macarii*, and should be ascribed to Abbot Marinus of Lérins; Kasper, *Theologie und Askese*, pp. 360-2 believes the *Regula Orientalis* to be older, however, and written by Faustus of Riez. Both agree on a *terminus post quem* of 456 and a *terminus ante quem* of the last decade of the fifth century.

<sup>40</sup> *Regula Orientalis*, c. 17, 36, p. 474; c. 18, 1, p. 476.

entry into monastic life nor their special requirements received any attention. Furthermore, there is no reason to assume that these boys were child oblates; they may as well have been sons who entered the community together with their fathers, or orphans who found a safe haven within the monastic precincts. The same holds true for the works of Cassian and Sulpicius Severus. Only in the course of the sixth century did children become the subject of special monastic legislation. Their growing numbers obviously made a differentiated treatment of various age groups inevitable.

## 2. CHILD OBLATION IN BENEDICT'S RULE

The sixth century was a very creative period in Western monasticism.<sup>41</sup> Several rules destined to exert lasting influence on monastic life came into being. Among those, the Rule of Benedict holds pride of place, mainly because of its auspicious later history. Originally, it was no more than one of many rules of purely local significance. Early medieval abbots created their own guidelines for their communities; most of these were orally transmitted, but some were written down. Such rules circulated widely, contributing to a growing monastic tradition upon which new communities could draw for inspiration. For a long time, monastic regulations remained diverse and flexible; various combinations of written rules were used, along with orally transmitted local customs. In early seventh-century Gaul Benedict's Rule was excerpted and blended with various local texts. An especially popular combination was that of the *Regula Benedicti* with the *Regula Columbani*.<sup>42</sup> But other monastic codes remained influential as well. Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) and his successor Aurelian (d. 551) each produced rules for nuns as well as monks; where nunneries were concerned, the *Regula ad virgines* completed by Caesarius in 534 seems to have been as successful as the writings of Benedict or Columbanus.<sup>43</sup> This so-called era of 'mixed

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. De Vogüé, *Les règles monastiques anciennes*, pp. 12-6, for a survey of the various generations of monastic rules.

<sup>42</sup> Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 267-88.

<sup>43</sup> About Merovingian female monasticism and the rules of Caesarius and Aurelian, see especially Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, with a survey on pp. 72-4 of the influence of the rules of Caesarius, Aurelian, Donatus, Waldebert and Columban in Merovingian nunneries.

rules' came to an end in the ninth century, when the Carolingian rulers made the *Regula Benedicti* the only valid framework of monastic life in the Empire.<sup>44</sup> Henceforth, the Rule of Benedict gained a monopoly that was to last for over 300 years. Yet it should be kept in mind that this dominant position was reached only gradually, and that older traditions by no means became obsolete.

The precise relationship between Benedict's Rule and contemporary monastic texts remains a matter for debate. Similarities between the *Regula Benedicti* and the *Regula Magistri* have led to one of the most bitter controversies of monastic scholarship,<sup>45</sup> which has recently been given a new lease of life. Initially, Benedictine scholars considered the Rule of the Master to be unworthy of having served as their saint's model, for it lacks Benedict's clarity and succinctness. The Master's is the longest monastic rule ever written; it is elaborate to the extent of garrulity. By the 1970s, however, after long and heated debate most scholars agreed that Rule of Benedict was indeed younger than the Rule of the Master and indebted to it. Dom Adalbert de Vogüé has been the most eloquent proponent of this view.<sup>46</sup> In his opinion, the Rule of the Master originated near Rome between approximately 500 and 530, while Benedict – who used the Master as his source – wrote between 530 and the 550s. Most scholars agreed, but recently a new case has been made for Benedict's priority.<sup>47</sup> The Master's elaborate institutions as well as his liturgical customs could lend support to the idea that his was not an older rule improved upon by Benedict, but rather one of the many 'mixed' rules that drew upon the Rule of Benedict in an eclectic fashion.

This new approach has some consequences for the history of child oblation as well. Benedict's is the only rule to provide a precise instruction for the ritual of oblation, firmly situating it in the sacrificial context of a mass. This was the shape child oblation was to take in the

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<sup>44</sup> Moyse, 'Monachisme et réglementation monastique'; Semmler, 'Benedictus II'.

<sup>45</sup> About this controversy, see Knowles, 'The *Regula Magistri* and the Rule of St. Benedict'; Jaspert, *Die Regula Benedicti-Regula Magistri-Kontroverse*; Hagemeyer, 'Die Regula Benedicti in der neueren Forschung'; idem, 'Die Entstehung der *Regula Benedicti*'.

<sup>46</sup> De Vogüé (ed.), *La Règle du Maître*, vol. I, pp. 221-33; idem (ed.), *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, vol. I, pp. 30, 169-72. Cf. also the articles gathered in idem, *Le Maître, Eugippe et Saint Benoît*; furthermore, Rennner, 'Benediktusregel', pp. 573-7.

<sup>47</sup> Dunn, 'Mastering Benedict', whose arguments have been sharply refuted by De Vogüé, 'The Master and Benedict'. As things stand now, I tend to reserve judgement.

Carolingian age, but it is notably absent from the seventh-century monastic rules which excerpted parts of the Rule of Benedict. It seems that Benedict's ritual of child oblation was an innovation which only slowly gained acceptance, just as his other novelty – the hebdomary psalms – met with resistance in contemporary monastic circles. If the Master did indeed write after Benedict, using him as his source, the conclusion must be that here was yet another monastic author who decided that Benedict's way of child oblation was not appropriate to the needs of the community he had in mind, for the Master's way of accepting youngsters into the monastery was very different.

Consequently, a widespread reluctance to follow Benedict on this point is all the more probable; this may have been caused by the radical nature of child oblation as presented in his Rule. There is a puzzling divergence between its prescriptions for the entry of adults and those regarding children. Where adults are concerned, Benedict's Rule (c. 58) is extremely circumspect. Everything possible was done to discourage the newcomer, forcing him to prove that he really knew what he was doing. To begin with, he was refused admission for four or five days; if he persisted firmly in his resolve, he was permitted to enter the confines of the monastery.<sup>48</sup> After having spent two months in the novices' abode (*cella novitiorum*) the Rule was read to him. Only if he promised to endure this trial, his period of probation was extended. Twice again during the remainder of a year, the Rule was read out to him to ensure that he understood what he was committing himself to, and only after ample reflection could the novice finally make his profession. In the oratory, with the whole community present, the novice made his threefold vow: stability, a monastic way of life, and obedience.<sup>49</sup> This had to be put into writing, in a charter referred to as the *petitio*, which the novice deposited upon the altar while reciting the versicle *Suscipe me*. Then he prostrated himself in front of all present with the request that they pray for him. From the moment this request was granted, he was considered a full member of the community: he no longer had 'the power over his own body'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 1-5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 58, 17-8: 'Suscipiendus autem in oratorio coram omnibus promittat de stabilitate sua et conversatione morum suorum et oboedientia, coram Deo et sanctis eius, ut si aliquando aliter fecerit, ab eo se damnandum sciat quem inridit'. Cf. Hoppenbrouwer, 'Conversatio'; De Bhaldrathe, 'Conversatio'.

<sup>50</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 25: '... quippe qui ex illo die nec proprii corporis se habiturum scit'.



This was the culmination of a long and difficult trial period; at every stage the novice was given the opportunity to reconsider and to leave the community. The succeeding chapter on child oblation breathes a very different spirit: a child's entry into the monastery was as quick as it was irrevocable.

It reads as follows:

*Regarding the sons of nobles and of the poor who are offered.*

If a noble person offers his son to God in the monastery, if the child is still young, let his parents draw up the document (*petitio*) we have already discussed, and enfold the hand of the boy in the altar-cloth together with the offering and offer him in this manner.

As far as their possessions are concerned, the document in question should contain their solemn oath never to give him anything nor to provide him with the opportunity to possess anything – either themselves, or through an intermediary, or in any other way; if they do not wish to do this but rather, for their soul's sake, would like to give alms to the monastery, let them make an offering of which – if they so choose – they may retain the usufruct. Thus let all roads back be cut off, so that the boy has nothing further to look forward to that might, as we know from experience, tempt him and – God preserve us! – lead him to damnation.

Let poorer people do likewise. But those who really have no possessions at all should simply draw up the document and offer their son with the offering in the presence of witnesses.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *RB*, c. 59: '*De filiis nobilium aut pauperum qui offeruntur.*

1 Si quis forte de nobilibus offerit filium suum Deo in monasterio, si ipse puer minor aetate est, parentes eius faciant petitionem quam supra diximus,

2 et cum oblatione ipsam petitionem et manum pueri involvant in palla altaris, et sic eum offerant.

3 De rebus autem suis aut in praesenti petitione promittant sub iureiurando, quia numquam per se, numquam per suffectam personam nec quolibet modo ei aliquando aliquid dant aut tribuunt occasionem habendi;

4 vel certe si hoc facere noluerint et aliquid offere volunt in elemosinam monasterio pro mercede sua,

5 faciant ex rebus quas dare volunt monasterio donationem, reservato sibi, si ita voluerint usum fructum.

6 Atque ita omnia obstruantur ut nulla suspicio remaneat puero per quam deceptus perire possit – quod absit – quod experimento didicimus.

7 Similiter autem et pauperiores faciant.

8 Qui vero ex toto nihil habent, simpliciter petitionem facient et cum oblatione offerant filium suum coram testibus'.

Benedict was adamant: all ties between the oblate and the world outside the monastery had to be severed. Compared to the extreme caution surrounding the acceptance of adults, the radical ruling concerning oblates indeed seems an anomaly. It has been suggested that Benedict intended the oblation ritual as the beginning of a probationary period, after which the boy still could return to the world if he wished to do so.<sup>52</sup> The fact that no tonsure or monastic habit is mentioned seems to support this assumption, but all the other evidence speaks against it. The document which the parents had to hand over during the ritual is described as 'the *petitio* we have already discussed', by which Benedict referred to the *petitio* in which the adult novice recorded his oral profession.<sup>53</sup> These two documents should be similar, implying that the *petitio* of an oblate also contained the threefold vow, and was addressed to the abbot and local saints. In the case of an oblate, however, the parents were the ones who had to draw up this *petitio*, which means that they made the monastic vow on behalf of their son. Additionally, the *petitio* had to contain a solemn oath by which they divested their son of all independent means of existence which might lure him out of the monastery. This document, therefore, consisted of two separate but connected juridical acts: the monastic vows and an oath regarding the boy's possessions. Both were designed to ensure that the oblate remained permanently in the monastic community. Benedict evidently was familiar with runaway oblates and expressed his horror of this by the words 'quod absit!' – the same phrase he used when referring to adult monks breaking their vow.<sup>54</sup>

The vow of the parents on behalf of their child carried the same weight as that of an adult novice; that much is clear. The Rule speaks of *parentes* in the restricted sense of the word, for the oblate is called a

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<sup>52</sup> Riepenhoff, *Zur Frage des Ursprungs*, pp. 43-91. His arguments – based on the assumption that Benedict was closely following Basil's rule – have been effectively countered by Stegemann, 'Die Verbindlichkeit der Oblation', esp. pp. 126-133, and Lentini, 'Note sull' oblazione'. According to John Boswell the issue remains unresolved; however, in Boswell's rendering of *RB*, c. 59, the crucial section – stating that the boy should be cut off from all worldly temptations – has been omitted. Cf. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 231-2.

<sup>53</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 20: 'Quam petitionem manu sua scribat, aut certe, si non scit litteras, alter ab eo rogatus scribat et ille novicius signum faciat et manu sua eam super altare ponat'. Cf. Steidle, *Die Benediktusregel*, p. 163; De Vogüé, *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, vol. VI, pp. 957-9.

<sup>54</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 28: '... ut si aliquando suadenti diabulo consenserit ut egrediatur de monasterio – quod absit – tunc exutus rebus monasterii proiciatur'.

'son'. His age is not specified, but the expression *puer minor aetate* suggests that the child was young as well as incapable of making his own profession. It seems unlikely that Benedict was employing precise legal terminology, for he was writing a monastic rule, not a juridical text.<sup>55</sup> The *minor aetas* of contemporary Roman law included all those who had not yet completed their twenty-fifth year of life, comprising a much larger age group than Benedict envisaged.<sup>56</sup> Neither should the expression *puer* be taken to refer to the distinct phase of *pueritia*, which ran from the seventh until the fourteenth year, for elsewhere the Rule uses the terms *infans* and *puer* indiscriminately.<sup>57</sup> Most likely child oblates in Benedict's time could be anywhere under fifteen years of age, for the Rule considers this as the age until which children need special discipline and custody;<sup>58</sup> probably, Benedict had the fifteenth year in mind as the beginning of the age of reason (*aetas intelligibilis*), when youthful monks no longer needed special attention.<sup>59</sup>

If we assume that its formality required the *petitio* to be the same in all cases, it follows that all parents, rich or poor, were to include the oath of dispossession in their *petitio*. This makes sense, for the poor could still get richer after they had donated their son. But for obvious reasons Benedict was most worried about scions of rich families. Wealthy parents were given a choice between keeping the inheritance of their child for themselves or giving 'alms' to the monastery, for the salvation of their souls. This *elemosyna* could apparently be very substantial, for the Rule envisages possessions of which the parents might wish to reserve the usufruct during their lifetime. By the ninth century, this *donatio* had become mandatory, and it had to embrace the

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<sup>55</sup> Of course, Benedict employed some of the juridical terminology of his age; to approach his text as if it were a legal treatise, as Jacobs has done, seems to be a distortion. Cf. Jakobs, *Die Regula Benedicti als Rechtsbuch*.

<sup>56</sup> Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht*, vol.II, pp.116-7; see also Medicus, 'Minores'.

<sup>57</sup> Cf *RB*, c. 30 ('De pueris minori aetate'), c. 30, 2 ('pueri vel adulescentiores aetate'), c. 39, 10 ('pueris vero minori aetate'), c. 45, 3 ('infantes'), c. 63, 9 ('pueris'), c. 63, 18 ('pueri parvi vel adulescentes'), c. 70 ('infantes') and c. 70, 6 ('infantibus'). All the time, the text refers to those who, in view of their tender age, should get special treatment.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 70, 4-5: 'Infantum vero usque quindecim annorum aetates disciplinae diligentia ab omnibus et custodia sit; sed et hoc cum omni mensura et ratione'.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 63, 18-19: 'Pueri parvi vel adulescentes in oratorio vel ad mensas cum disciplina ordines suos consequantur. Foris autem vel ubiubi, custodiam habeant et disciplinam, usquedum ad intelligibilem aetatem perveniant'.

entire inheritance of the oblate.<sup>60</sup> In Benedict's day, this was not yet the case. The parents could do what they liked with their son's property, although it seems likely that moral pressure may have induced them to think of their souls. If they chose to do so, they had to make a *donatio* to the monastery. A similar donation is mentioned in the case of adult novices, who could either give away their possessions to the poor, or donate them to the monastery; in that case, the donation should be made *sollemniter*.<sup>61</sup> If Benedict adhered to the requirements of Roman law, this meant that the donation was recorded in a written document and personally handed over, in the presence of witnesses (*traditio corporalis*).<sup>62</sup> At a later stage, document and witness were recorded in the public registers kept by the municipality.<sup>63</sup> This was the correct procedure in the case of solemn donations, to which parents of a child oblate most likely had to conform. Nevertheless, the handing over of the donation charter was not integrated into the oblation ritual itself.

The focus of this ritual was the altar. Here, the parents had to offer their child 'to God in the monastery', by wrapping his hand in the altar-cloth, together with the *petitio* and the *oblatio*. The latter was not an ordinary 'offering' such as land or money, for gifts of that nature are usually referred to in the Rule as *elemosyna*. In Benedict's time, '*oblatio*' was the usual term signifying the eucharistic offerings of bread and wine donated by the faithful during the offertory procession.<sup>64</sup> Thus, a close symbolic connection was established between the eucharistic gifts and the child oblate. Both were *oblaciones*, to be sanctified by being brought into physical contact with the altar. The main message of the oblation ritual was clear: the child itself was a passive offering, to be consecrated at the very moment when his hand was enfolded in the altar-cloth. This was what the witnesses present had

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<sup>60</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 300; Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 550.

<sup>61</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 24: 'Res si quas habet, aut erogat prius pauperibus aut facta sollemniter donatione conferat monasterio, nihil sibi reservans ex omnibus ...'; cf. Jacobs, *Die Regula Benedicti als Rechtsbuch*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>62</sup> Levy, *West Roman Vulgar Law*, pp. 139-41; Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht*, vol. II, pp. 280-1.

<sup>63</sup> About the persistence of these *gesta municipalia* in Merovingian Gaul, see Wood, 'Administration, law and culture', pp. 64-5.

<sup>64</sup> The Master uses similar terminology when speaking of the consecration of the new abbot in the context of mass; the abbot had to offer his *oblatio* at the altar. *RM*, c. 93, 8, p. 424: '... iam missae altaris in oratorio a clerico recitetur, ipso oblationem fratre offerente'.

to see and hear. Their presence was required to validate the *petitio*, and to ensure what seems to have been foremost in Benedict's mind: that the oblation of a child be as final as the solemn profession of an adult.

### 3. THE RULE AND OTHER RULES

Benedict's Rule is the only one to choose this eucharistic setting for the oblation of a child. If the Master indeed took Benedict as his major source of inspiration, he must consciously have diverged from his model, adapting it to his own requirements, for the 'child oblate' he had in mind played a much more active role in the proceedings. He was a high-born son (*filius nobilis*) as well, who had personally expressed a wish to enter God's service, but was still under parental authority. The Master decided that such a boy should be accepted into the monastery even if the parents opposed his wishes, for, he claimed belligerently, God is able to safeguard His own.<sup>65</sup> Were the parents to agree with their son's vow (*votum filii*), however, they could be the ones to dedicate and offer him, invited to do so by the abbot.<sup>66</sup> As for their son's possessions, the parents had three options. First, donating the boy's entire inheritance to the poor; second, splitting the inheritance in three parts, of which one would be given to the poor, one to the family and one retained for the boy to take with him into the monastery to cover his living costs in the community (*viaticum*); third, retention of the inheritance by the parents, on condition that they promise under oath to disinherit their son and to refrain from giving him anything.

Like Benedict, the Master was much preoccupied with guarding the young monks' stability, which could obviously be threatened if earthly possessions awaited them outside the monastery. They might go back to

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<sup>65</sup> *RM*, c. 91, 1-4, p. 398: 'Cum alicuius nobilis filius propter Dei servitium in monasterium voluerit convolare, non prius suscipiatur, nisi, ut superius diximus, omnia a se oboedientiae promiserit adimplenda. Deinde conveniantur eius parentes, ut et eorum quale sit votum cognoscatur de eo. Quod si contrarii extiterunt interim usque ad vim pro eo Domino inferendam, claustro monasterii vindicetur, quem potens est Dominus defendere propter se, quia fortior est dextera eius ad protegendum, quam diaboli iniquitas ad ledendum'.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 91, 6, p. 398: '... ut ab ipsis potius videatur devoveri vel offerri'.

the world and marry, 'returning like a dog to their vomit'.<sup>67</sup> The solutions he came up with are reminiscent of Benedict, and both authors insist that the boy should not retain control of his inheritance. But whereas Benedict accorded all initiative to the parents, the Master envisaged a boy who was operating independently, prepared to pursue his resolve even when in conflict with his parents' wishes. Only the *filius nobilis* needed any kind of regulation, for his property might endanger his commitment. Since his parents were the ones who controlled his inheritance their co-operation was useful, but by no means indispensable. The Master was thinking of boys who, while not yet able to dispose of their possessions, were old enough to undertake a binding vow: in other words, adolescents rather than young children. Furthermore, the parental oblation was optional; they could 'offer and vow' their son to monastic life, but this was no more than a stamp of approval following their son's own profession. This minimal role accorded to the parents also makes it most unlikely that the children involved were very young.

And yet, the Rule of the Master clearly shows that the monastery he wrote for harboured young children as well. Like Benedict, he treated them differently in dietary and disciplinary matters. Children under twelve years of age were subjected to a more lenient dietary regime, which the Master outlined in great detail.<sup>68</sup> As for the age of reason, however, he adopted a different age limit: *infantuli* under fifteen years old were to be beaten rather than excommunicated, for the young ones would not understand the meaning of penance.<sup>69</sup> Customs varied widely when it came to allowing youngsters to make a binding vow. In Visigothic law, as we shall see, children could do so already at the age

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 91, 37, p. 404: '... sicut canis delectatus at suum redit vomitum ...'. (Prv 26, 11; 2 Pe 2, 22).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 27, 41-2, p. 148; c. 28, 19-26, pp. 154-6; c. 50, 78, p. 238; c. 53, 4-6, p. 242; c. 59, 10, p. 276.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 14, 79-80, p. 60: 'Infantulos vero usque quindecim annorum non excommunicari, sed praecipimus vapulare pro culpis. Post quindecim vero annos iam non vapulare, sed excommunicari condecet, quia iam intellegunt quodmodo peniteri et emendare debeant de matura aetate quod male committunt ...'. Hildemar of Corbie/Civate seems to have followed the age limits of the Master in dietary as well as in disciplinary matters, although he used the age limit of fifteen as a minimum age at which a boy might attain the *aetas intelligibilis*. Cf. De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery', pp. 103-9.

of ten.<sup>70</sup> But surely if the Master took fifteen to be the age of reason, this also must have been the age at which he considered adolescents old enough to stand by their own decision. Probably the sons of nobles for whom he legislated were fifteen years old at least – old enough to make their vows, but not yet in control of their property. Nevertheless, this leaves us with a problem, for how then did the younger children get into the Master's monastery?

His Rule provides no answer to this question, and neither do other monastic rules of the sixth and seventh centuries. This does not necessarily imply that young children were a negligible quantity in monastic life, for in these texts they are very much present. Caesarius of Arles wrote his *Rule for virgins* for his own foundation of St Jean of Arles, where the nuns seem to have been under much pressure to accept very young children. Caesarius cautioned them to set six or seven years as a minimum age, for only girls of that age or older would be susceptible to discipline and schooling. But he expressed himself hesitantly – 'if it is manageable' – and allowed for exceptions.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the third abbess of St Jean, Rusticula, entered the monastery when she was hardly five years old.<sup>72</sup> The nuns of St Jean not only had to deal with very young charges, but also with parents who treated the monastery as a convenient place to have their daughters brought up and educated, only to reclaim them when they were of marriageable age. On this point, Caesarius put his foot down: only girls who were committed to religious life were to be accepted.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, there was no shortage of little girls in St Jean, but obviously some parents refused to relinquish authority over daughters educated in this convent. This must have been more of a problem in female than in male communities, for in their rules for monks neither Caesarius nor Aurelian mentioned the possibility of boys being reclaimed by their parents. Aurelian did have misgivings about boys entering the monastery at an unsuitable age, however: in his monastic rule, which relied heavily on Caesarius' *Rule for Virgins*, Aurelian put

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<sup>70</sup> See below, § 4.

<sup>71</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 7, 3, p. 186: 'Et si potest fieri, aut difficile aut numquam in monasterio infantula parvula, nisi ab annis sex aut septem, quae iam et litteras discere et oboedientiae possit obtemperare, suscipiatur'.

<sup>72</sup> *Vita Rusticulae*, cc. 3-6, pp. 341-2.

<sup>73</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 7, 4, p. 186: 'Nobilium filiae sive ignobilium ad nutriendum aut ad docendum penitus non accipiantur'.

the minimum age of acceptance at ten to twelve years.<sup>74</sup> Whereas Caesarius accepted girls as soon as they were old enough to be properly trained (*'quae iam et litteras discere et oboedientiae possit temperare'*). Aurelian wanted boys who no longer needed to be treated as children (*'nutriri non egeant, et cavere noverint culpas'*). Does this imply that boys were expected to participate more fully in monastic life than girls, once they entered the community? This is suggested by Aurelian's rule for nuns, which exempted the 'little ones' (*parvulae infantes*) from intensive liturgical duties.<sup>75</sup> But this is deceptive, for the first thing little girls had to do was to learn their *litterae*, like adult novices, in order to fulfil their liturgical obligations.<sup>76</sup> More likely, the physically weak – little girls, the sick and the elderly – did not have to participate in the more exerting liturgical duties, just as they were treated more leniently in matters of food and drink.<sup>77</sup> If girls indeed started monastic life at an earlier age than boys, it may have been precisely because of their important role in the communal liturgy. Their childish innocence was a tremendous asset to communities entirely geared towards prayer, for their purity rendered prayer all the more efficacious.<sup>78</sup>

Neither Caesarius nor Aurelian gave specific instructions for their ritual of entry into monastic life. Caesarius's *Rule for virgins* does

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<sup>74</sup> Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad monachos*, c. 17, col. 390: 'Minori aetate in monasterio non excipitur nisi ab annis decem aut duodecim, qui et nutriri non egeant, et cavere noverint culpas'. This male community was founded in 547 by Aurelian, King Chilbert and his wife Uutrogota; it was located within the walls of Arles. Cf. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles*, pp. 262-3. About Aurelian's creative use of the models provided by Caesarius, see Diem, *Mobilität und Disziplinierung*, pp. 66-79.

<sup>75</sup> Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 18, col. 402: 'In omni ministerio sive ordo psallendi, aut legendi, vel operandi, vicibus succedant; absque abbatisa, vel praeter satis senes et parvulas infantes, aut certe ita infirmas, ut surgere omnino non possint, non compellantur facere quod non praevalet'.

<sup>76</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 18, 7, p. 192: 'Omnes litteras discant'. Cf. Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 26, col. 402.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 36, col. 403: 'Extra mensam communem nihil cibi potusve gustare liceat; absque infirmis et illis qui minoris aetatis sunt'. Cf. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 301-2. About Benedict's Rule and exceptions made for children, see above, § 2; also De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery', 103-10. About liturgical participation of children and food regulations in later monastic *consuetudines*, cf. Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*, pp. 140-9 and 276-87.

<sup>78</sup> The importance of prayer in Merovingian nunneries is excellently and extensively treated by Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, passim. About childhood, purity and prayer, see below, chapter IV, § 2.



stipulate a probationary period for all novices, however. For a whole year they were to be supervised by a *senior*, without changing their clothes or sharing the sleeping quarters of the nuns; and even after doing so, they remained on probation until those in authority decided they could be admitted. Although Caesarius only spoke of those who 'converted' to monastic life, who presumably were old enough to decide for themselves, he may well have had a similar probation in mind for young girls.<sup>79</sup> But in the *Recapitulatio* Caesarius added in 534 the requirement of probation was left out,<sup>80</sup> and it is absent from his rule for monks as well; neither do the rules of his successor Aurelian show much concern with the need for probation.<sup>81</sup> On one point, however, both bishops were adamant: that the newcomer divest him/herself of all personal wealth by means of a written deed (*carta*) of donation or sale. This was especially important for adult women, such as widows, wives who had left their husbands, those who had taken the veil outside a religious community, or unmarried virgins who were legally capable.<sup>82</sup> Those under age or still unable to dispose of their inheritance

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<sup>79</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 4, p. 182: 'Ei ergo, quae deo inspirante convertitur, non licebit statim habitum religionis adsumere, nisi antea in multis experimentis fuerit voluntas illius adprobata; sed uni de senioribus tradita per annum integrum in eo, quo venit, habitu perseveret. De ipso tamen habitu mutando vel lecto in scola habendo, sit in potestate prioris, et quomodo personam vel conpunctionem viderit, ita vel celerius vel tardius temperare'. See Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 265-8, who appropriately characterises this as a 'geteiltes "Noviziat"' (p. 285), which took place partly in the hospice and partly within the community itself.

<sup>80</sup> The so-called *Recapitulatio* encompasses cc. 48-65 (pp. 232-52) of the *Regula ad virgines* in the new edition of De Vogüé, who does not believe it to have superseded the rule itself, but rather to have summarised it. It was followed by two *ordines* and a conclusion, and signed by Caesarius himself and seven bishops. Cf. De Vogüé, (ed.), *Césaire d'Arles, Oeuvres monastiques*, vol. I, pp. 58-61.

<sup>81</sup> Aurelian of Arles (*Regula ad virgines*, c. 1, col. 399) merely demanded that prospective nuns knew his *Rule* and promised to obey it before being accepted: 'Hoc iubente Deo imprimis statuimus inviolabiliter tenendum, ut si qua ad conversionem venerit, Regula ei in salutorio legatur, et si professa fuerit se omnia impleturam, tunc excipiantur ...'.

<sup>82</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 5, pp. 182-4: 'Quae autem viduae, aut maritis relictis, aut mutatis vestibibus ad monasterium veniunt, non excipiantur, nisi antea de omni facultaticula sua, cui voluerint, cartas aut donationes aut venditiones faciant, ita ut nihil suae potestati, quae peculiariter aut ordinare aut possidere videantur, reservent (...). Quam rem etiam et illae, quae virgines convertuntur, si implere noluerint, aut non recipiantur, aut certe vestimenta religiosa non permittantur

were to do likewise as soon as they gained control of their property at the death of their parents.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, young girls could attain full membership of the community before the drawing up of the required deed of sale or donation. The Master must have had something similar in mind, if parents proved unwilling to support their son's resolve. In this case the boy would have to take steps himself, once he came into his inheritance.

The absence of an oblation ritual in the monastic writings of Caesarius and Aurelian becomes less strange when one realises that the same holds true for the ritual of profession. Anything like the elaborate ritual sequence of Benedict and the Master is completely lacking here. This does not mean, however, that the acceptance of monks and nuns was a completely informal affair. Both Caesarius and Aurelian hinted at solemn and public vows marking the definitive entry in the community,<sup>84</sup> but it was the disposal of property which claimed most of their attention. A non-specific period of probation came to an end with tonsure and/or robing or veiling. These served as visible signs of the novice's acceptance into monastic life. If the profession ritual was not important enough to merit explicit attention, it is not surprising that these rules also remained silent where the rite of oblation was concerned.

Monastic authors dependent upon the rules of Arles predictably display a similar lack of concern with profession and oblation rituals. This is even true of those that knew and used the Rule of Benedict as well. The earliest dissemination of the *Regula Benedicti* is closely

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accipere, donec se ab omnibus impedimentis mundi istius liberas fecerint'. Cf. Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 2, cols. 399-400.

<sup>83</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 6, 1, p. 184: 'Illae vero, quae adhuc vivis parentibus substantiam suam in potestate habere non possunt, aut adhuc minoris aetatis sunt, cartas tunc facere compellantur, quando res parentum in potestate habere potuerint aut ad legitimam aetatem pervenerint'.

<sup>84</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 265-6. The texts referring to a *professio* or a *votum* are somewhat problematic, however. Aurelian did demand that novices promise to faithfully obey the rule before they became part of the community, but his text is based on that of Caesarius who explicitly stated that such a *votum* should be undertaken at the beginning of the probationary period. Cf. Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad monachos*, c. 1, col. 385; *Regula ad virgines*, c. 1, col. 339; Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines (Recapitulatio)*, c. 58, p. 242. It therefore remains doubtful whether Aurelian had in mind anything like a formal vow in the presence of the whole community after probation was entirely completed; the promise to obey the rule may have taken place earlier. Cf. Capelle, *Le voeu d'obéissance*, pp. 98-100.

connected with communities inspired by Columbanus' foundation Luxeuil; these monasteries generally used a combination of monastic rules, of which Benedict's was one of the more important ones.<sup>85</sup> A good example of such an adaptation is the *Rule* written by Bishop Donatus (d. 658) for the convent of Ste Marie in his see of Besançon. He excerpted Benedict's Rule, along with the *Regula Columbani* and Caesarius' *Regula ad Virgines*. He also adopted the latter's warning not to accept girls younger than six or seven years old,<sup>86</sup> as well as his instruction that novices were to dispose of their possessions by means of a *carta*.<sup>87</sup> Significantly, Donatus also incorporated Caesarius' refusal to accept girls as temporary pupils, stipulating that they should be nuns in habit, 'just like the others'.<sup>88</sup> This matter obviously remained a bone of contention in female monasticism. From Benedict's threefold vow he only took the two elements of stability and obedience, as was common at the time.<sup>89</sup> All of the Benedictine profession ritual he omitted, however, as well as the oblation rite. The same happened in the *Rule* which Waldebert, the third abbot of Luxeuil, composed for the nuns of Faremoutiers. It drew upon the models provided by Columbanus and Benedict, but made no mention whatsoever of a ritual of either profession or oblation.

Nonetheless, to these authors children represented an important group within the community. This is already indicated by Donatus's insistence upon treating them as nuns rather than as pupils; his remark that they 'keep their order at all times' probably means that these girls had their own place within the communal hierarchy.<sup>90</sup> Waldebert of Luxeuil

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<sup>85</sup> Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, pp. 267-88. De Vogüé, *Les règles monastiques anciennes*, pp. 12-6.

<sup>86</sup> Donatus of Besançon, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 6, 13, p. 251.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 7, pp. 251-2.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 54, 2, p. 291: 'Neque ad nutriendum, neque ad docendum, nobilium vel pauperum filiae recipiantur, nisi quae in monasterio sub habitu religionis, sicut et reliquae, perseverent'.

<sup>89</sup> Donatus (c. 6, 1, pp. 249-50) restricted the vows to 'oboedientia ac stabilitas', as was customary before the Aachen reform councils of 816/817. See Herwegen, *Geschichte der benediktinischen Professformell*, and Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', pp. 46-7.

<sup>90</sup> Donatus of Besançon, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 66, 9, p. 302: 'Iuenculae per omnia ab omnibus disciplina teneantur'; cf. *RB*, c. 70, 4: 'Infantum vero usque quindecim annorum aetates disciplinae diligentia ab omnibus et custodia sit ...'. I agree with Muschiol that Donatus probably had a separate hierarchy for the young

devoted an extensive chapter to their education, declaring that he 'had learned from many writings with how much care and discipline children should be brought up within the monastery'. He outlined a programme of strict supervision aimed at excluding all opportunity for sin, but also demanding loving attention and discretion. The little girls ate at a separate table, with two or more seniors carefully watching them; the abbess was to decide whether the children needed extra food or sleep.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, adolescents were not to share a bed, lest they be tempted by 'the heat of the flesh'.<sup>92</sup> Such texts are an indication of a changing recruitment pattern; children had become sufficiently numerous to merit their own table as well as a separate chapter in Waldebert's Rule.

Bishop Donatus of Besançon, as his name indicates, was himself a child oblate who was brought up in Luxeuil. His barren parents were blessed by Columbanus, on condition that they vow their firstborn to God.<sup>93</sup> There is ample evidence that 'Columbanian' monasteries harboured children as a matter of course,<sup>94</sup> and sources from other communities point in the same direction. The *Life of the Jura Fathers*,

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girls in mind; cf. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 303. About boys being sufficiently numerous to form their own *ordo* within the monastery, see De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery', pp. 109-10.

<sup>91</sup> Waldebert of Luxeuil, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 24, col. 1070: 'Infantes in monasterio quanta cura et disciplina sint enutrienda, multis dicimus documentis. Debent enim nutrirī cum omni pietatis affectu, et disciplinae monasterii: ne desidiae vel lasciviae vitio sub tenera aetate maculatae, aut vix, aut nullatenus possint postea corrigi. Sit ergo in eis tanta cura, ut nunquam sine seniore huc atque illuc deviare: sed semper ab ejus disciplina retentae, et timoris Dei ac amoris doctrina imbutae, ad cultum instruantur religionis. Habeant lectionis usum; ut sub puerilii aetate discant, quod ad perfectam deductis proficiat. In refectorio per se mensam habeant juxta seniorum mensam positum. Seniores tamen vel duae, vel amplius, de quarum religione non dubitatur, cum eis sedeant, ut semper timore anteposito, sub metu seniorum nutriantur. Quibus vero horis reficiant, vel somnum capiant, abbatisae arbitrio pensandum est; ut in omnibus virtutum custodia discretio reperiatur'.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 14, col. 1065: 'Iuenculas vero nullatenus simul quiescere censemus, ne in aliquo carnis adversitate aestu delicto rapiantur'.

<sup>93</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, I, c. 14, p. 79.

<sup>94</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 307-12; the author rightly objects (*ibid.*, p. 307, n. 307) to my rather limited discussion of hagiographical texts in *Kind en klooster*, pp. 44-48. At the time I was too exclusively interested in texts yielding insight in a 'proper' child oblation, i.e. including a parental vow or sacrifice; I agree wholeheartedly, however, that other material should also be taken into account. I will do so below, chapter IV, § 2.

written in the second decade of the sixth century, yields the story of Abbot Eugendus who was the third abbot of the Jura monasteries. Eugendus had entered monastic life when he was seven years old, evidently as a child oblate, for he is presented as a sacrifice to God and a new Samuel.<sup>95</sup> Judging by the memories he related to his hagiographer he grew old in the cloister together with others who had been there from childhood onwards;<sup>96</sup> and his hagiographer himself was a young boy (*puerulus*) when he entered the community.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Remiremont's abbot Amatus came to Agaune as a gift to God.<sup>98</sup> His hagiographer, who wrote towards the end of the seventh century,<sup>99</sup> depicted his oblation as the result of a parental vow, as in Donatus's case.

In other words, child oblates were clearly present in these monasteries, but sixth and seventh-century rules remain silent on the oblation ritual. The same goes for conciliar legislation. A council convened in Orléans in 549 by King Childebert I ruled that all nuns should have a novitiate of at least one year before taking the veil; in nunneries that were not cloistered their probationary period was to last even three years. This applied not only to those who entered of their own volition, but also to girls being offered by their parents. Only those who took their sacred vows after a proper trial period were to be excommunicated if they strayed.<sup>100</sup> Most of all, the bishops in Orléans were concerned about girls and women committing themselves too hastily; in this respect, they put child oblates on a par with novices acting upon their own initiative. This in itself seems incompatible with parents making the vows on behalf of their children, as Benedict wished them to. The decision of 549 may indeed have caused problems, for later Merovingian

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<sup>95</sup> *Vitae patrum Jurensium*, c. 125, pp. 372-4: 'Mox igitur eum litterarum insituit elementis et, anni exacto circulo, tamquam Samuhel quondam, non in typico excurbaturus templo, sed ipse potius Christi efficiendus templum, sancto Romano oblatus est patri'. See 1 Sam 3, 3: 'Lucerna Dei nondum extincta est, et Samuel dormiebat in templo Domini, ubi erat arca Dei'.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 126, p. 374.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 78, p. 324.

<sup>98</sup> *Vita Amati*, c. 2, p. 261: '... atque beati Mauricii liminibus mancipandus adolescens tamquam munus Deo acceptabili offeretur'.

<sup>99</sup> Wood, 'The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian hagiography', p. 66, n. 1; Heinzmann, 'Studia sanctorum', p. 115, no. 36. Amatus was born in the years 565/70, and died after 628. Wood considers his *vita* to be a 'genuine' one.

<sup>100</sup> Council of Orléans (a. 549), c. 19, *Concilia Galliae*, vol. II, p. 155.

councils no longer demanded a novitiate for all, while considering parental initiative and a personal conversion equally binding. The council of Mâcon (581-583) ruled that vows taken 'voluntarily or at the request of the parents' (*volumtaria aut parentibus suis rogantibus*) were to be irrevocable, and the council of Paris (614) took a similar stance.<sup>101</sup> It looks as if earlier insistence upon a proper trial period had given way to combatting any violation of religious vows, whether these had been taken voluntarily or not.

These religious vows did not necessarily imply entrance in a religious community, however. As Gisela Muschiol pointed out, Merovingian Gaul retained the tradition of consecrated virgins (*Deo sacratae*) living outside the monastic confines, presumably within their family of origin.<sup>102</sup> Bishops were responsible for such women, as well as for their sisters living within the cloister. This partly explains why Merovingian councils only legislated for girls, leaving boys out of the picture. As the council of Arles (554) put it bishops were to be entrusted with the care of nunneries.<sup>103</sup> The episcopate was in charge of female religious, and these councils were very much an episcopal affair. The council of Orléans (549) was attended by 42 bishops, eleven priests and only one abbot, a situation which remained unchanged throughout the sixth and early seventh century. The bishops clearly wished to extend their control to monks as well, but despite their repetitious insistence that monasteries should not be founded without their approval,<sup>104</sup> episcopal control over abbots and their flock remained precarious at best.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Council of Mâcon (a. 581-583), c. 12, *ibid.*, p. 226; council of Paris (a. 614), c. 15 (13), *ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>102</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 41-63. Such *Deo sacratae* included virgins as well as 'widows' — i.e. those who had either lost or left their husbands.

<sup>103</sup> Council of Arles (a. 554), c. 5, *Concilia Galliae* vol. II, p. 171-2: 'Ut episcopi de puellarum monasteriis, quae in sua civitate constituta sunt, curam gercant nec abbatisae eius monastrii aliquid liceat contra regulam facere'. See also Council of Arles (a. 511), c. 19, *ibid.*, p. 10. Episcopal supervision may have been an important reason why most sixth-century nunneries were founded within episcopal cities; cf. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 64.

<sup>104</sup> Council of Agde (a. 507), c. 27, *Concilia Galliae*, vol. I, p. 205; Council of Orléans (a. 511), c. 22, vol. II, p. 11; Council of Epaon (a. 517), c. 10, *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> For example: Council of Orléans (a. 511), cc. 7 and 19, *ibid.*, pp. 7 and 10; Council of Epaon (a. 517), cc. 8 and 10, *ibid.*, p. 26; Council of Orléans (a. 533), c. 21, *ibid.*, p. 102; Council of Orléans (a. 538), c. 26, *ibid.*, p. 124; Council of Orléans (a. 541), c. 11, *ibid.*, pp. 134-5; Council of Orléans (a. 549), c. 13, *ibid.* p. 152;

Thus, like other internal affairs of male monasteries, the acceptance of oblate boys remained outside of the bishops' competence, except in communities founded and funded by the bishops themselves.

There may have been another reason, however, why episcopal legislation between 549 and 614 was primarily concerned with women: when it came to prayer for the faithful, communities of virgins played a prominent role. In an age in which priesthood and celebration of votive masses had not yet become a central feature of monasticism, the power of female prayer equalled that of men. Given their cloistered and strictly supervised way of life, nunneries may even have had an edge on male communities, in that their prayer was guaranteed to be performed within a context of purity.<sup>106</sup> No wonder, then, that bishops took it upon themselves to guard the integrity of *puellae oblatae*, whose virginity represented an institutionalised form of cultic purity.

#### 4. OBLATION IN THE VISIGOTHIC REALM

In comparison with the Merovingian realm, Visigothic bishops of the seventh century seem to have had better control over the internal life of male monastic communities. The Spanish councils systematically addressed a host of problems ensuing from monastic life, including those created by the irrevocable nature of child oblation. The first to do so was a general council which opened in Toledo in December 633. It was chaired by Isidore of Seville (d. 636) and attended by no fewer than 69 bishops or their representatives. The participants discussed a wide range of important issues, including child oblation. It was agreed that a monastic vow could be taken either by the person directly involved or by a parent; in both cases, the vow was irrevocable. Thus, two pathways to monastic life were defined as equivalent: a personal profession and a parental oblation.<sup>107</sup>

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Council of Arles (a. 554), cc. 3 and 5, *ibid*, pp. 171-2. Cf. Diem, *Mobilität und Disziplinierung*, pp. 132-52.

<sup>106</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 305.

<sup>107</sup> Fourth council of Toledo (a. 633), c. 49, *Concilios visigóticos*, p. 208: 'Monachum aut paterna devotio aut propria professio facit; quicquid horum fuerit, alligatum tenebit: proinde eis ad mundum reverti includimus aditum, et omnem ad saeculum interdicimus regressum'.

It seems improbable that this strict interpretation stemmed from the influence of the Rule of Benedict, for it did not leave a clear imprint on Visigothic monastic life. Why should it then have done so only in the case of child oblation?<sup>108</sup> Besides, how flexible were earlier attitudes towards child oblation? The second council of Toledo (527) indeed granted boys a choice to marry or to remain in the church when they reached eighteen, but it spoke of those who had been destined by their parents for the clerical office (*clericatus officium*).<sup>109</sup> Therefore, they were secular clergy; as such, they could marry, provided that they remained thenceforth in the lowest ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and showed no ambition for higher office. For it was only attainment of the higher ranks which could not be reconciled with the married state. The decision of 633, on the other hand, dealt with *monachi* who had entered monastic life either as the result of a personal choice or because of an act of 'paternal devotion'.

Was the decree of 633 an innovation? It seems unlikely, but there is no proof for this assumption. None is to be found in the rule for monks that Isidore himself composed between 615 and 624. This is yet another monastic rule in which a group of small children (*parvuli*) form a distinct but integrated part of the community. They stood at the table while the older monks took their meals seated in the refectory.<sup>110</sup> Isidore made special provision for such children, limited as they were in both physical strength and mental power; he imposed no strict fasting on them and adapted the discipline to their capacities.<sup>111</sup> He reckoned with the presence of a 'host of little ones',<sup>112</sup> but he failed to lay down any special instructions with regard to their reception in the monastery. This is all the more surprising in view of the very strict requirements he made of adults on this point. Just as a soldier was not allowed to enlist without his name being entered on a special register (*in tabellis*), the monastic

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<sup>108</sup> The arguments in favour of the *RB* putting an end to the 'flexibility' of Spanish child oblation have been put forth by Orlandis, 'La oblación', pp. 55-61. They belong to an older phase of research, however, which vastly overestimated the *RB*'s influence. Cf. Mattoso, 'L'introduction de la Règle de S. Benoît', which reviews Linage Conde, *Los orígenes del monacato benedictino*. To my regret, I have not succeeded in locating this in-depth study of the spread of Benedict's Rule in Spain.

<sup>109</sup> Second council of Toledo (a. 527), c. 1, *Concilios visigóticos*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>110</sup> Isidore, *Regula monachorum*, c. 9, 2, col. 878.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 11, 3, col. 881; c. 18, 2, col. 887; c. 20, 5, col. 891.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 9, 2, col. 878: '... reliqua turba parvulorum assisent'.



vow should be recorded in writing as well.<sup>113</sup> Were children to do likewise when they grew up, or were the parental vows to be duly recorded? It is impossible to say.

Clearly, the decision of 633 gained wide influence, within the Visigothic realm as well as in later Carolingian legislation. It was to become a standard text to be constantly quoted by all those arguing in favour of irrevocable child oblation. Still, monastic life in the Iberian peninsula was far from uniform; it was a thriving affair with many local variations, which also must have affected child oblation. The document known as the *Regula communis*, for example, gives a good picture. This monastic rule was drawn up by a meeting of abbots inspired by Archbishop Fructuosus of Braga (d. c. 665).<sup>114</sup> They emphatically protested against the spontaneous and irregular increase in monasteries, which were sprouting like mushrooms without any control on the part of ecclesiastical authority. The abbots complained that many men had established churches and monasteries on their estates, sweeping wives, children, neighbours and servants along with them when converting to a monastic life unworthy of the name.<sup>115</sup> The seventh-century *Life* of Fructuosus also witnesses to the mass nature of the movement. The author states that the flock of converts in the saint's Cadiz foundations reached such enormous proportions that the civil authorities became alarmed and wished to stem the flow.<sup>116</sup>

With something similar in mind, the abbots of the *Regula communis* drew up an extensive set of prescriptions, regulating the intake of whole families into monasteries. Husbands, wives and children were to live as guests and pilgrims, subject to the rules of the community.<sup>117</sup> As far as can be made out, the parents did not necessarily enter the community as monks or nuns; nothing further is said about their fate, for the children were the principal focus of interest. They were indeed destined for monastic life and to be prepared for it outside the monastic confines up to the age of seven; during this preparatory period they were allowed

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 4, 2, col. 872.

<sup>114</sup> Díaz y Díaz, 'S. Fructueux de Braga', col. 1544.

<sup>115</sup> *Regula communis*, c. 1, col. 1111; cf. Orlandis, 'Sociología monástica', pp. 48-9.

<sup>116</sup> *Vita Fructuosi*, c. 15, pp. 106-8.

<sup>117</sup> *Regula communis*, c. 6, cols. 1115-6; Orlandis, 'La oblación', pp. 54-5.

to maintain regular contact with their parents.<sup>118</sup> But once they reached seven, depending on their gender they were transferred to either a monastery or a nunnery to remain there forever, without any communication with their parents. Apparently a considerable number of religious came from the ranks of the children of *conversi*, who might or might not enter monastic life themselves. To some extent this may be considered as a form of child oblation; in fact, the parents placed not only themselves but also their children under the abbot's *potestas*, which meant that the children lost 'the power over their own body'.<sup>119</sup> Yet the practice differs from oblation as prescribed in Benedict's Rule, since the notion of the child as a sacrifice is completely lacking.

Visigothic monasteries must have harboured a motley crowd; many of the adult recruits were in fact penitents. The council of 633 dealt with those who had received tonsure as a sign of their penance, denying them the possibility of returning to the lay state; the same stricture was laid upon 'those tonsured at the instigation of their parents or who, after the decease of their parents, had dedicated themselves to the service of God'.<sup>120</sup> In other words, religious vows could be the result of a penance, an oblation or a personal undertaking. If someone acted of his or her own accord, it was understood that the parents were no longer alive; otherwise, they would have been the ones to take the initiative. Given this situation, the customary opposition between 'child oblates' and 'adult novices' seems to be of limited value, for this decree implies

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<sup>118</sup> *Regula communis*, c. 6, cols. 1115: 'Sed inter utrosque foveantur, quousque quantulumque regulam cognoscant, et semper instruantur, ut sive sint pueri sive puellae, monasterio provocentur ubi habitare futuri erunt'. The author indeed had very small children in mind, for he called them 'filii parvuli, id est infra septem annos' and 'parvulos, quos adhuc in crepundia videmus tenerculos'. Fructuosus himself grew up *ex parvulo* in a monastery; cf. *Vita Fructuosi*, c. 15, pp. 106-8.

<sup>119</sup> *Regula communis*, c. 6, col. 1115: 'Primum nullam corporis sui potestatem habeant'.

<sup>120</sup> Fourth council of Toledo (a. 633), c. 55, *Concilios visigóticos*, p. 210: 'Quicumque secularibus accipientes poenitentiam totonderunt, et rursus praevaricantes laici effecti sunt, comprehensi ab eiscopo suo ad poenitentiam ex qua recesserant revocentur; quod si aliqui per poenitentiam irrevocabiles sunt nec admoniti revertuntur, vere ut apostatae coram ecclesia anathematis sententia condemnentur. Non aliter et hii qui detonsi a parentibus fuerint aut sponte sua amissis parentibus se ipsos religione voverunt, et postea habitus saeculares sumserunt, et idem a sacerdote comprehensi ad cultum religionis acta prius poenitentia revocentur; quod si reverti non possunt, vere ut apostatae anathematis sententiae subiciantur'.

that children without surviving parents might act of their own accord, while adolescents could still enter the monastery at the instigation of their parents. The only category of new monks and nuns who were clearly older were the penitents.

Current penitential practice was so harsh that the penitential and monastic state were practically similar. Indeed, a penitent who wanted to shoulder all the burdens of canonical penance could do little else but lead a semi-monastic life. He could not marry, carry arms or hold public office for the rest of his life. Conversion and penance, therefore, became virtually indistinguishable; in fact, the monastery was the most suitable place to fulfil a penance, or to lock away those who failed to do so.<sup>121</sup> It looks as if public penitents in the Visigothic realm were tonsured or veiled, and could no longer return to the world. Some of those called *conversi* in contemporary texts must therefore have been penitents; when King Chindasvind incorporated the ruling of 633 on penitents in secular law, it was under the heading of 'the men and women who have taken the tonsure or the habit'. Again, parental oblation is presented as one of three ways to enter religious life; penance, a personal vocation or a 'pious parental oblation' (*pia parentum oblatio*).<sup>122</sup>

In spite of this unequivocal legislation, abuse of child oblation continued. The tenth council of Toledo (656) tried to remedy this situation, and its decree reveals which forms of malpractice the bishops were up against. Boys or girls who at their parents' instigation had received tonsure or habit were prohibited from ever returning to the outside world. This also applied to those who had entered religious life unbeknown to their parents. If the latter protested as soon as they found out, they could still reclaim their child, but once they had allowed him or her to appear in public with tonsure or habit, the child was bound to religious life forever. Parents could only donate children under ten years old, however. Once their sons and daughters had reached this age, they should make their own decision — with or without parental consent.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> De Jong, 'Power and humility', pp. 42-3.

<sup>122</sup> *Lex Visigothorum*, III, 5, 3, p. 161-2. The expressions used are *penitentia*, *pia parentum oblatio* and *propria voluntas*; all three are treated as equivalently binding motives for entering clerical or monastic life.

<sup>123</sup> Tenth council of Toledo (a. 656), c. 6, *Concilios visigóticos*, p. 313: '... si in qualibet minori aetate vel religionis tonsuram vel religioni debitam vestem in utroque sexo filis aut unus aut ambo parentes dederint, certe aut nolentibus vel nescientibus se susceptam non mox visam in filiis abdicaverint, sed vel coram esslesia palamque

Judging by the wording of this decree, parental oblations had been declared invalid because only one parent was involved, for the bishops emphasised that mother and father could act both independently and jointly. They also turned against parents who changed their mind later on, claiming that they were not informed of their child's entry into religious life. Of course we must also reckon with boys and girls who ran away to the monastery against their parent's wishes. Apparently, exposing the external signs of the religious state to public view was of crucial importance, for a child who had once been publicly seen with tonsure or habit was obliged to wear them for ever thereafter. For similar reasons, fallen penitents were characterised as 'men and women who sin against tonsure and habit'. Rather than taking the vows, being tonsured or veiled seems to have been the decisive moment in entering monastic life.

The age limit chosen – the tenth year – seems surprisingly low. Could children indeed take such an important decision at so young an age against the wishes of their parents? Later authors such as Burchard of Worms and Ivo of Chartres, who included this decision in their collections of canon law, changed the age limit to twelve.<sup>124</sup> All the same, the tenth year did have some roots in Visigothic law. A boy who converted to Judaism could not be held responsible before his tenth year; if he was any older, however, he was punished as severely as an adult who had fallen from the faith.<sup>125</sup> Another example: spoken and written declarations made by children under fourteen were not valid in law, except in the case of a serious illness, when the pronouncements of children aged ten and older did acquire legal validity.<sup>126</sup> Both provisions show that under Visigothic law a ten-year-old child was accorded a measure of legal responsibility sufficient to make his or her personal

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in conventu eosdem filios talia habere permiserint ad secularem reverti habitum ipsis filiis quandoque penitus non licebit, sed convicti quod tonsuram aut religiosam vestem aliquando habuerint, mox ad religionis et cultum habitumque revocentur, et sub aeterna districtione huiusque observantiae observare cogantur. Parentibus sane filios suos religioni contradere non amplius quam usque ad decimum aetatis eorum annum licentia poterit esse, postea vero an cum voluntate parentum an suae devotionis sit solitarium votum, erit filiis licitum religionis adsumere cultum'.

<sup>124</sup> Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, VIII, c. 1, cols. 791-2; Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, VII, c. 27, col. 552.

<sup>125</sup> *Lex Visigothorum*, XII, 3, 11, p. 438.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 5, 11 (= IV, 3, 4), p. 111.

conversion to monastic life legitimate and binding. Undoubtedly the bishops who gathered in Toledo in 656 had been confronted with older children who had been sent to the monastery unwillingly, thus endangering the regularity and stability of monastic life.

Yet their cautious decision had little effect. Despite its status of a 'national' council, attendance in 656 was much lower than in 633: only seventeen bishops and five episcopal representatives were present, most of them from the north of the realm.<sup>127</sup> Their detailed verdict on child oblation had no repercussions whatever in Visigothic secular law or subsequent ecclesiastical legislation, whereas the more general prescription of 633 had a great impact on later Carolingian legislation. The general declaration of principle making *devotio paterna* and *propria professio* equally binding was to be used as a weapon in the hands of supporters of irrevocable child oblation.

## 5. MISSIONARIES AND CHILD OBLATES

This rigid position vis-à-vis child oblation was not limited to Spain. A similar stance was taken by Pope Gregory II, in response to a letter from the Anglo-Saxon monk Boniface. During his long career as a missionary and reformer on the Continent, Boniface repeatedly turned for advice to Rome, bombarding successive popes with anxious queries. Thus, in 726 he sent his fellow countryman Denewald to Rome, bearing a long list of questions. One of those was on child oblation: did it have irrevocable consequences? The papal reply left no room for doubt:

You further asked whether, when a father or mother have placed a son or daughter in childhood under the discipline of the rule in a monastery, it is permitted to them, after attaining puberty, to leave and enter marriage. We reject this under all circumstances, for it is a sacrilege that lust should be given unbridled rein in children offered by their parents to God.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>128</sup> Boniface (and Lull), *Epistolae*, no. 26, p. 46: 'Addidisti adhuc, quodsi pater vel mater filium filiamque intra septa monasterii in infantiae annis sub regulari tradiderint disciplinae, utrum liceat eis, postquam pubertatis inoleverint annos, egredi et matrimonio copulare. Hoc omnino devitamus, quia nefas est, ut oblati a parentibus Deo filiis voluptatis frena laxentur'.

Pope Gregory II phrased his answer with great precision. Both father and mother had the right to offer a child, be it male or female. Thus, the pope forestalled the argument that an oblation made by the mother was invalid. Clearly, oblation concerned young children, living a monastic life from the moment they had been handed over by their parents. Some parents, however, changed their minds once these children reached a marriageable age, and pulled them out of the monastery again once an attractive partner had been found. This was sacrilege (*nefas*), the pope said, for a gift to God should not be defiled; the sexuality of marriage was incompatible with the children's consecrated state.

Along with the decree of Toledo (633) this papal pronouncement was to become a core text supporting the irrevocability of child oblation.<sup>129</sup> Obviously there were no qualms about this in Rome in 726 – but what about Thuringia, where Boniface worked when he wrote this letter? And what about the Anglo-Saxon church in which he grew up?

As for Thuringia, Boniface's letters make it quite clear that this region was already christianised when he arrived on the scene. He was concerned about deviant Christian practice, not about paganism. Was it permitted to administer confirmation for the second time? Was mass valid when it was celebrated with two chalices instead of one? Should baptism be administered to kidnapped children who did not know whether they had been baptised already, or to those who had been baptised by adulterous priests? Did lepers have the right to receive communion? And was Boniface allowed to eat or talk with unworthy priests? His question about child oblation should be interpreted in a similar context. Obviously, Thuringian parents were familiar with child oblation, but they had the unfortunate habit of reclaiming their gift when it suited them.

The question remains whether Boniface himself was in any doubt about their right to do so. Given his personal history, this does not seem likely, for he himself entered a monastery in childhood. Willibald's account of the way Boniface was handed over was inspired by biblical and hagiographical models. At the age of four or five, apparently, little Winfrith stubbornly struggled with his father who bitterly opposed the boy's desire to become a monk. Only after a miracle of punishment, whereby the father fell seriously ill, did he come round, and following

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Council of Worms (868), c. 22, Mansi XV, col. 873; Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, VII, c. 15, col. 548; Gratianus, *Decretum*, C. 20, q. I, c. 2, cols. 843-4.

a consultation with members of the family he handed his son over to Wulfhad, abbot of a monastery in Exeter.<sup>130</sup> Here the topos of a discordant conversion, bringing the convert into serious disagreement with his family, has gained the upper hand in an account which – in view of the tender age of the ‘convert’ – can be little else than the disguised report of a paternal act of oblation.<sup>131</sup>

Many others had preceded young Winfrith. The Venerable Bede perhaps is the best known example. In 679/80, as a child of seven, he was handed over by his relatives (*propinqui*) to Benedict Biscop for a further education, and admitted to the latter’s foundation of St Peter’s in Wearmouth. As Bede wrote when he was fifty-nine years old: ‘Since then I have passed my whole life in this monastery and have dedicated myself completely to the Holy Scripture’.<sup>132</sup> A substantial group of family members was involved in the decision to entrust the young Bede to Benedict Biscop, for instead of referring to his father or mother he spoke of his ‘*propinqui*’ handing him over.<sup>133</sup> Was this an act of oblation proper, or rather ‘the equivalent of putting the boy in charge of foster parents’, as Colgrave phrased it?<sup>134</sup> There is much to be said for the second interpretation,<sup>135</sup> but Bede did become a full member of the community at an early age. When Bede was about nine, Ceolfrid was put in charge of the recently founded St Paul’s at Jarrow, and Bede was possibly one of those who accompanied Ceolfrid from Wearmouth to the new foundation. Ceolfrid’s hagiographer stated that he took twenty-two brothers with him: ‘ten who were tonsured and twelve who were still

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<sup>130</sup> Willibald, *Vita prima Bonifatii*, c. 1, pp. 460-2.

<sup>131</sup> A key text in this type of hagiographical writing regarding *conversio* is Mt 19, 29, which speaks of the hundredfold reward awaiting him who leaves father, mother, land and other worldly possessions to follow Christ; Willibald also quoted it in this context. See Angenendt, *Monachi peregrini*, pp. 130-2; Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 17-21.

<sup>132</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V, c. 24, p. 566: ‘... cunctumque ex eo tempus vitae in eiusdam monasterii habitatione peragens, omnem meditandis scripturis operam dedi ...’.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Qui natus in territorio eiusdem monasterii, cum essem annorum VII, cura propinquorum datus sum educandus reverentissimo abbati Benedicto, ac deinde Ceolfrido ...’.

<sup>134</sup> Colgrave (ed.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, p. xx.

<sup>135</sup> See below, chapter VI, § 3.

waiting for the blessing of tonsure'.<sup>136</sup> In view of his tender age Bede may have belonged to the latter category, but whatever the case, the whole party moving to Jarrow was described as *fratres*. In other words, they were considered monks, whether they were tonsured or not. Ceolfrid's biography provides a glimpse of the burdens which could fall upon the shoulders of a young member of the community. When the plague attacked the monastery and all those who usually sang the choral prayer had been taken ill, the antiphons and responsories were taken on jointly – 'with no little effort' – by the abbot and a little boy who was being brought up and educated by him.<sup>137</sup>

Bede's writings contain several interesting references to the dedication of children, both implicit and explicit. His letter to Archbishop Egbert of York – who himself had been placed in a monastery by his parents – quoted the example of Samuel, praising not only Samuel's justice but also his innocence, a constant theme in praise addressed to oblates.<sup>138</sup> In a moving passage he wrote of little Aesica, a three-year-old boy who was brought up by the nuns of the double house of Barking (Essex); the boy fell victim to the plague, and on his deathbed called out to one of the sisters, Eadgyd – his nurse? – who immediately followed him to the heavenly kingdom.<sup>139</sup> In double monasteries, apparently, the female religious had the task of nurturing those who still needed maternal care.<sup>140</sup> Another very young oblate was Aelfled, the daughter of the Northumbrian king Oswiu. On the eve of battle, the king vowed

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<sup>136</sup> *Vita Ceolfridi*, c. 11, p. 391: '... namque acceptis secum XXII fratribus, decem quidem attonsis, XII vero tonsurae adhuc gratiam expectantibus ...'.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 14, p. 393. The *puerulus* in question may have been Bede himself, for the author wrote of him: '... nunc usque in eodem monasterio presbyterii gradum tenens, iure actus eius laudabiles cunctis scire volentibus et scripto commendat, et fatu ...'. According to McClure and Collins (eds.), *Bede, The Ecclesiastical History*, p. xiii, Bede's transition to Jarrow is improbable, especially because he was a mere 12- or 13-year-old when the plague raged, and would therefore hardly have called himself a 'puerulus'. Given the vagueness of early medieval terminology concerning childhood and youth, this argument is inconclusive at best, but neither can it be proved that Bede himself was the boy in question.

<sup>138</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, c. 7, p. 411.

<sup>139</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, c. 8, p. 358.

<sup>140</sup> *Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz data* (a. 803-804), c. 7, MGH Capit. I, p. 119. About double monasteries in England, see Thacker, 'Monks, preaching and pastoral care', pp. 142-4. The Carolingian reaction against these practices already started under Pippin III: *Concilium Vernense* (a. 755), c. 6, MGH, Capit. I, p. 34.



to God his daughter and sufficient land for twelve monasteries. After his victory, he kept his promise; Aelfled was duly dedicated to God's service, even though she was only one year old.<sup>141</sup> She later entered the *monasterium* in Hartlepool, eventually becoming abbess of the influential double house at Whitby.<sup>142</sup>

In England's *monasteria*, children were a familiar phenomenon.<sup>143</sup> Alcuin grew up from his earliest years in the minster of York; when in adulthood he worked on the continent, he reminisced about the motherly love with which his 'dear fathers' in York had surrounded him.<sup>144</sup> His hagiographer, writing between 821 and 829, said that the young Alcuin had been 'brought to the mystical bosom of the church when he was weaned from his mother's carnal breasts'.<sup>145</sup> This metaphor may have been a statement of fact as well, for children entering the monastery at age three or even less must indeed have been weaned only recently. Alcuin himself employed similar terminology when writing of Willibrord's oblation: his father took him directly from his mother's breast (*statim ablactatum*) to the brothers at Ripon 'where he saw nothing but that which was honourable, heard nothing but that which was holy'.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, III, c. 24, pp. 290-2.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 185-207, about the friendship between Aelfled and St Cuthbert.

<sup>143</sup> About Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, see above all Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters'.

<sup>144</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 42, pp. 85-6.

<sup>145</sup> *Vita Alcuini*, c. 1, p. 185: '... qui cum matris ablactaretur carnalibus, ecclesiae traditur mysticis imbuendus uberibus'. Cf. 1 Sam 1, 23-24: 'Mansit ergo mulier et lactavit filium suum, donec amoveret eum a lacte. Et adduxit eum secum, postquam ablactaverit, cum vitulo trium annorum et tribus modis farinae et utre vini; et adduxit ad domum Domini in Silo. Puer autem erat adhuc infantulus'.

<sup>146</sup> Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, c. 3, pp. 117-8: 'Factum est post circulum dierum, peperit mulier filium, sacroque baptismatis fonte regenerato, imposuit ei pater nomen Willibrord, et statim ablactatum infantulum, tradidit eum pater Hyrpensis ecclesiae fratribus religiosiis studiis et sacris litteris erudiendum ... ubi nihil videret nisi honesta, nihil audiret nisi sancta'. See about this text Townsend, 'Alcuin, Levison and the MGH', p. 127, who convincingly suggests the following: 'He [Levison] has furthermore edited out the activity of Willibrord's mother subsequent to her son's birth: MSS 4b (which Levison just followed for its spelling) and 8a read *mater* for *pater*, thus giving her responsibility for the choice of name; the reading *ablactavit* would make even better sense were *mater* the subject; *mater* would also eliminate the peculiarity of *pater* unnecessarily restated as a subject with *tradidit*'. I am grateful to Rob Meens for bringing this article to my attention.

Again, the theme of the child being weaned from the world may very well have concurred with actual practice.

The consecration of children seems to have been well-established in the Anglo-Saxon church. No wonder, then, that hagiographers censured those who went back on their promise. Between 709 and 731 Eddius Stephanus wrote the *Life* of Bishop Wilfrid of York, the powerful leader of three *monasteria*: York, Hexham and Ripon.<sup>147</sup> One of the miracles attributed to him is reviving an infant after its mother had promised that the boy would live for 'God and for him'. He baptised the infant, and instructed the mother to care for the boy until he was seven, at which age she must 'return the child to God's service'. Led on by her husband, the mother failed to keep her promise, all the more when she saw how her son was growing up to be a fine boy. She fled with her child, but was tracked down not long afterwards and made to honour her commitment. Her son Eodwald, who was given the significant nickname of '*Filius episcopi*' ('the bishop's son') was taken into the Ripon community where he died subsequently during an epidemic.<sup>148</sup>

The significance of this poignant story is clear. Because Wilfrid had brought the boy back to life he belonged to the saint and to God; the mother had no right to withdraw her promise. The episode shows a dilemma with which many parents must have been faced. Vows of this kind were frequently made while the child was still a mere infant, or even before birth. What should parents do when the promised baby had grown into a handsome and strong child? Some of them seem to have solved the problem by offering another child as a substitute – probably one that was physically less well endowed and therefore more suited for monastic life. This solution is condoned by Theodore of Canterbury's influential collection of penitential canons.<sup>149</sup> Although it was better to fulfil a vow completely, parents were allowed to let another child take

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<sup>147</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 14-6.

<sup>148</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 18, pp. 38-40.

<sup>149</sup> The collection was probably put together in England between 690 and 720; Vogel, *Les 'Libri Paenitentiales'*, pp. 68-70; Levison, 'Zu den Canones Theodori Cantuariensis'; Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, pp. 63-9; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 51-5.

the place of the one originally promised, just as they could do with cattle.<sup>150</sup>

Theodore's collection also elucidates the age at which a child had the right to take the religious vow independently, without parental permission: a boy could do so at age fifteen while a girl had to wait until her sixteenth or seventeenth year.<sup>151</sup> The minimum age for girls seems to have been inspired by Basil's letter to Amphilochius of Caesarea.<sup>152</sup> Basil's influence indeed was at work, as another of Theodore's *canones* shows:

Basil was of the opinion that boys had the right to marry before their sixteenth year, if they were unable to refrain, even though they had already become monks.<sup>153</sup>

Basil's precepts seem to have been little understood, however, for he certainly did not wish youngsters to marry *after* they had made their monastic vows; to the contrary, these had to be put off until a suitable age. This idea was obviously unfamiliar to Anglo-Saxon monasticism, for here we are dealing with adolescents who were already monks in the full sense of the word. Indeed, one version of Theodore's collection gives an addendum to the prescription just quoted, stating that a young monk entering into marriage before his sixteenth birthday is guilty of bigamy and must do a year's penance.<sup>154</sup> Entry into monastic life was meant to be permanent, also for young boys; that much is obvious.

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<sup>150</sup> *Theodori canones*, D, c. 42: 'Infans pro infante potest dari ad monasterium Deo quamvis alium vovisset. Et tamen melius votum implere. Similiter pecora cetera, si necesse est, pro eo equali'. See also *ibid.*, G, c. 163; Co., c. 183-4. Version U, II, xiv, c. 5-6 gives the following text: 'Infans pro infante potest dari ad monasterium deo quamvis alium vovisset, tamen melius est, votum implere. Similiter pecora equali pretio possunt mutari si necesse sit'.

<sup>151</sup> *Theodori canones*, D, c. 166; G, c. 43; U, II, xii, c. 37. Version G, c. 186 gives a different instruction, setting the minimum age for girls at fifteen. Version Co. c. 111-2, however, accords the *corporis potestas* to girls at fourteen, while a boy remains in his father's power until sixteen years of age; U, II, xii, c. 36 also states: 'Puella autem XIV annorum sui corporis potestatem habet'. Apparently, various traditions were influencing this collection of canons.

<sup>152</sup> Basil, *Letters*, vol. II, no. 199, p. 156.

<sup>153</sup> *Theodori canones*, D: 'Basilius iudicaverit puero licentiam nubere ante XVI annos si abstinere non potuerint, quamvis monachi facti fuissent'. About Basil's influence, see Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 51.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, Co., c. 109; see also *ibid.*, U, II, vi, c. 11: 'Puer non licet iam nubere prelo ante monachi voto'.

Nonetheless, Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical authorities were clearly vexed by young monks of marriageable age returning to the world. The problem was inherent in the practice of child oblation itself, so it is not surprising that Boniface was faced with the same old issue once he started his work on the Continent.

Child recruitment was a familiar phenomenon in continental monasteries of Anglo-Saxon inspiration. Boniface's preaching in southern Bavaria, for example, led to the local nobility offering their children 'in order to educate them for the service of the Lord'.<sup>155</sup> One of those was young Sturm who later was to become abbot of Fulda, where he in turn brought up Eigil, another of Fulda's leaders.<sup>156</sup> As a letter by Bishop Megingoz of Würzburg to his colleague Lull of Mainz shows, religious life in many ways resembled a family business. Megingoz sought advice about difficulties in the convent led by his sister until her recent death. Her decease had left the convent orphaned and disorganised. Megingoz considered no-one fit to succeed his sister, except his two little nieces both far from being of age.<sup>157</sup> These girls had entered a community headed by their aunt and supervised by their episcopal uncle; their ultimate destiny was to lead this noble convent themselves.

Boniface's relatives also played a leading role in organising monastic life on the continent. Lioba, the child oblate who became abbess of Tauberbischofsheim belonged to his kin,<sup>158</sup> and so did the brothers Wynnebald (d. 761) and Willibald (d. 787), respectively abbot of the double monastery of Heidenheim and bishop of Eichstätt.<sup>159</sup> A pen-portrait of the brothers was written shortly after 778 by Hugeburc – yet another member of the family. She was a nun in Heidenheim who not only gained much information from her fellow nun Walburga, sister of the saintly brothers, but also from Willibald himself: he dictated the

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<sup>155</sup> Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, c. 2, p. 132. For children entrusted to Willibrord, see also Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, cc. 5 and 13, pp. 9-10, 17-8.

<sup>156</sup> Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, cc. 1-2, pp. 131-2; Brun Candidus, *Vita Eigilis*, c. 1, p. 223.

<sup>157</sup> Boniface (and Lull), *Epistolae*, no. 130, pp. 268-9. Megingoz was a member of the noble family of the Mattones which founded several *Eigenklöster* and made generous donations to Fulda; cf. Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, p. 33, and Schmid, 'Die Frage nach den Anfängen der Mönchsgemeinschaft von Fulda', pp. 120-2.

<sup>158</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, c. 6, p. 124; about this text, see especially Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 271-300.

<sup>159</sup> Angenendt, 'Willibald zwischen Mönchtum und Bischofsamt'.

information on which Hugeburc based the first part of his *Life*. This makes the story of Willibald's oblation all the more valuable. Apparently, he fell violently ill when he was three years of age; his parents took him to a cross erected in the open, since, as Hugeburc explains, it was quite normal for noble Anglo-Saxon families to have crosses placed on their land for use in daily prayer. Having laid their child by the cross, the parents vowed that should young Willibald be cured, they would immediately have him tonsured and would dedicate him to monastic life.<sup>160</sup> The favour was granted, and when Willibald reached age five his parents fulfilled their promise. After preliminary consultation with relatives they took the necessary steps: they first approached an intermediary, the 'honourable and trustworthy Theodred', to whom they offered their child requesting that he accompany the boy to the monastery and do everything necessary for his acceptance. Then, together with Theodred, they took the boy to Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire where they handed him over to Abbot Egwald, 'and placed him under his authority as a young monk and obedient pupil, according to the abbot's law'.<sup>161</sup> The matter did not end there, for the abbot first sought the permission of his monks. Only when this had been granted did he accept the gift.

Such a detailed, almost autobiographical description of an oblation is rare. The particulars of the story speak for its veracity, and demonstrate the complex legal transactions hidden behind the usual scanty references to children being 'entrusted' to abbots for their education. Willibald's parents formally relinquished their authority over their son to Abbot Egwald, and the boy thus became subject to the abbot's law instead of that into he was born. They consulted their kinsmen first, and Theodred – who may have been a cleric – negotiated the conditions upon which the boy could be accepted by the monastery. No mention whatsoever is made of an oblation at the altar with bread and wine; Anglo-Saxon religious may have venerated Benedict as the 'Roman abbot',<sup>162</sup> but they did not live according to his Rule.

The letters exchanged between Anglo-Saxon religious on the Continent and their relatives and friends at home reveal that lasting

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<sup>160</sup> Hugeburc of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 1, p. 88.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2, p. 106: '... venerandoque abbatique illius monasterii qui vocatur Egwald offerebant, ast illum sui condicionis iure iuniorem seu oboediendo discipulum suo subdiderunt imperio'.

<sup>162</sup> Wollasch, 'Benedictus abbas Romensis'.

emotional ties were forged through child oblation. An anonymous correspondent reminded Lull of Mainz of their friendship, which went back to days when they were both monks in Malmesbury; here, Lull had been brought up by Abbot Eaba, who had nick-named him 'Lytel'.<sup>163</sup> Similar warm affection between educators and pupils can be detected in Alcuin's correspondence with his spiritual family, the monks of York, of whom he relates that they had surrounded him with so much 'motherly love' when he was a child. York's minster to him remained his spiritual and emotional home, where he hoped to die and be buried.<sup>164</sup> To monastic educators such as Willibald, their charges were their 'adoptive children' (*adoptivi nati*),<sup>165</sup> an attitude which may have done as much for the irrevocability of child oblation as all legal precautions put together.

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<sup>163</sup> Boniface (and Lull), *Epistolae*, no. 135, p. 274. His eleventh-century hagiographer, Lampertus of Hersfeld, also referred to Lull's entry into the monastery at age seven: Lampertus, *Vita Lulli*, c. 1, p. 136.

<sup>164</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 42, pp. 85-7.

<sup>165</sup> Hugeburc of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi*, c. 6, p. 106. About the importance of adoption and fosterage in Anglo-Saxon society, see below, chapter VI.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CAROLINGIAN LAW AND CHILD OBLATION

#### 1. 'GOD'S PRECEPT AND OUR DECREE'

The body of conciliar texts and capitularies surviving from the Carolingian era is characterised as much by diversity as by unity. The aims and scope of these texts vary considerably: some councils were of strictly local interest, while others addressed themselves to the whole of the Frankish church. The same goes for the motley collection of documents known as capitularies.<sup>1</sup> The *Admonitio generalis* (789), intended for all subjects, can scarcely be compared to royal memoranda preparatory to consultations with temporal or ecclesiastical advisers, nor to brief and businesslike instructions given to the *missi* prior to their travels around the Empire. Bearing this in mind, there is an undeniable unity in the ecclesiastical legislation of the period, especially after 789, the year in which the *Admonitio generalis* was promulgated. This capitulary set the tone for the legislative activity of the next fifty years, aiming at establishing political order as well as the moral correction of God's chosen people, the Franks; in the capitularies, the king's decree and God's precepts were firmly classified together.<sup>2</sup> This programme of reform was crowned by the great capitularies of Louis the Pious in the second decade of the ninth century.

The immediate effectiveness of the capitularies has been called into question, not only by modern historians but also by Charlemagne himself, who demanded at the end of his life that his *missi* take stock of the extent to which his subjects had disobeyed the many capitularies

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<sup>1</sup> About the difficulties of interpretation, see Mordek, 'Karolingische Kapitularien'; Schmitz, 'Capitulary Legislation', and especially Felten, 'Konzilsakten'; furthermore, Ganshof, *Recherches sur les capitularia*; McKitterick, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 18-21, 23-5; idem, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 101-2, 331-2.

<sup>2</sup> Werner, 'Gouverner l'empire chrétien'; Nelson, 'Kingship and empire'.

which he had issued during his long reign.<sup>3</sup> As Hubert Mordek remarked, if the great emperor was not sure of the impact of his precepts, how can we be certain, more than a millennium later? According to Mordek, much of the avalanche of parchment issued forth from the royal chancery had become lost already in the ninth century; when in 825/827 Ansegisis set himself the task of collecting all capitularies of the emperors Charles and Louis, he found only 26 of the over 100 that now are extant.<sup>4</sup> Others, however, view Ansegisis' collection as a deliberate selection made by a high-ranking administrator to be used in practice by his colleagues. Ansegisis' compilation – generally known as the *Legiloquus liber* – indeed rapidly gained the status of an authoritative law-book.<sup>5</sup> Kings after 877 admittedly produced very few capitularies, but they may have relied on collections like that of Ansegisis;<sup>6</sup> and capitularies became an integral part of ecclesiastical law from the ninth century onwards, exerting an influence that went far beyond the Carolingian era proper.

Capitularies – and conciliar texts, for that matter – should not be treated unreflectively as effective legislation. As Felten has argued convincingly, when certain items disappear from these texts, this does not mean that the problems had disappeared; conversely, repeated reference to malpractice or negligence cannot be taken as a sure sign of their omnipresence. These texts were issued in particular circumstances, and can only be interpreted by attempting to situate them in an equally

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<sup>3</sup> Mordek, 'Karolingische Kapitularien', p. 49, n. 140, citing Clm 19414, fol. 81 r. (a. 813): 'Illud autem omnibus hominibus praecepimus, qui fidelitatem nobis promissam custodire voluerint, ista capitula et his similia omnimodis observare, quisquis gratiam nostram habere voluerit; de istis autem capitulariis atque de aliis omnibus, quae a multis annis misimus per regnum nostrum, volumus nunc pleniter per missos nostros scire, quid ex his omnibus factum sit vel quis haec observet, quae ibi praecepta sunt, vel quis illa condempnat et neglegat, ut sciamus, quid de his agere debeant, qui tam multis annis dei praecepta et decretum nostrum contempserunt'.

<sup>4</sup> Ansegisis, *Praefatio*, MGH Capit. I, p. 394; Mordek, 'Karolingische Kapitularien', p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> McKitterick, 'Some Carolingian Law-Books'; Werner, 'Gouverner l'empire chrétien', pp. 83-9; Schmitz, 'Capitulary Legislation'. The latter (p. 428) concludes that Ansegisis' faulty attribution of various capitularies, which has been held against him by modern scholars, is largely irrelevant in view of the aim of the operation; contemporaries perceived capitulary legislation as a homogeneous whole, so the question of which king had issued them was of secondary importance.

<sup>6</sup> McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 332.



specific context.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the impact of Carolingian legislation should not be underestimated purely because they are 'normative texts'. Norms, after all, are also part of social reality; this also holds true for the persistent tension between ideal and practice expressed by capitularies and conciliar decrees.

Be this as it may, these texts reveal that the diffusion of Benedict's rule and its chapter on child oblation was a slow and tortuous process indeed. Carolingian legislation aimed for unity, especially in things liturgical and monastic, and the hallmark of monastic unity was the Rule of Benedict. A capitulary of the future king Pippin III dating from 743 was the first in a long series of precepts urging monks and nuns to live according to Benedict's Rule.<sup>8</sup> The establishment of its monopoly, however, took several generations. An imperial memorandum of 811 gives the impression that the prestige of the Rule had become unassailable, for Charlemagne asked his ecclesiastical counsellors whether monks could exist who did not live according to Benedict's Rule, and whether Gaul had ever known monasticism until the Rule became known here.<sup>9</sup> This seems to imply that the Rule had obliterated all other monastic traditions, but this appearance is deceiving, for in 813 councils in Tours and Mainz still needed to stress that all monasteries should live in accordance with Benedict's precepts, while a meeting in Rheims deemed it necessary to refresh the memory of abbots by reading the Rule to them.<sup>10</sup> This much is certain: by 813 the era of the mixed rules had not come to an end, and ancient sees like Reims that staunchly defended older monastic traditions were not yet ready for the next stage of reform,

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<sup>7</sup> Felten, 'Konzilsakten als Quellen für die Gesellschaftsgeschichte', pp. 181-9.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of relevant texts, see Albers (ed.), *Consuetudines monasticae*, vol. III, pp. 186-204.

<sup>9</sup> *Capitula tractanda cum comitibus, episcopis et abbatibus* (a. 811), c. 12, MGH Capit. I, pp. 161-2. The question was raised in a more precise manner in another memorandum composed in 811, where the emperor demanded information about monastic custom in Gaul in the days of St Martin – who after all had preceded St Benedict. *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractandis* (a. 811), c. 12, MGH Capit. I, p. 164. About these two memoranda, see Ganshof, 'Note sur les "Capitula"', who provides a new edition of the second document.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Tours, c. 26, MGH Conc. II,1, p. 290; council of Mainz, c. 11, *ibid.*, p. 263; council of Rheims, c. 9, *ibid.*, p. 255. Cf. Semmler, 'Karl der Große und das fränkische Mönchtum'.

which entailed not only one rule (*una regula*), but also a unified custom (*una consuetudo*).<sup>11</sup>

For this was the twofold goal of the great reforming councils held in Aachen in 816 and 817, convened by Louis the Pious and dominated by his adviser Benedict of Aniane. Predictably, it was not the acceptance of the Rule itself but its uniform interpretation that met with most resistance. Controversy raged about such issues as replacing the Roman Office with that of Benedict's Rule, abolishing the *laus perennis* (the round-the-clock singing of psalms), the position of the abbot within the community, the accessibility of monastic schools to outsiders and the duration of the novitiate.<sup>12</sup> The Aachen councils indeed succeeded in bringing monasticism under the Rule of Benedict, but this did not mean that Benedict of Aniane attempted to break completely with the Frankish empire's rich monastic heritage. Older traditions are still known precisely because the 'second Benedict' took the trouble to gather them into two major compilations, the *Concordia regularum* and the *Codex regularum*. These were to be the manifold source of inspiration from which the 'one custom' was to be drawn, a custom which needed further development and elucidation, so accordingly, commentaries on the Rule came into being. Abbot Smaragdus of St Mihiel – one of the *missi* who inspected the observance of the Aachen legislation – already completed part of his commentary while the reforming councils were still in progress, while Hildemar of Civite (d. c. 850) dictated his exegesis of the Rule to his pupils a generation later.<sup>13</sup> Both authors have tried to integrate older monastic rules into what they held to be the most faithful interpretation of Benedict's Rule, adding their own insights derived from everyday practice. Thus, these commentaries provide extremely valuable information on ninth-century life within the cloister, child oblation included.

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<sup>11</sup> Semmler, 'Benedictus II'.

<sup>12</sup> Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils'; McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 112-20; De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', pp. 629-34.

<sup>13</sup> For biographical data on Smaragdus, see Eberhardt, *Via Regia*, pp. 29-85. Hildemar's biography has been reconstructed by Traube and Plenkers, *Textgeschichte*, pp. 40-4, 107-8, which forms the point of departure for all subsequent literature. See also Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, pp. 97-8 and Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', p. 33, n. 75.

## 2. LEGISLATION ON CHILD OBLATION

Carolingian conciliar texts and capitularies dealing with cloistered life devoted much attention to the way in which new recruits were received into the monastery. The *Admonitio generalis* insisted on newcomers being tested according to the Rule<sup>14</sup> – a clear warning against over-hasty acceptance of new monks perhaps unsuitable for monastic life that was to be repeated over and over again. The legislation is scattered with evidence of irregularity in this department. In no uncertain terms abbots and bishops who tempted unsuspecting and illiterate persons to be tonsured in order to lay hands on their property were called to order.<sup>15</sup> ‘Gifts’ obtained in this perfidious manner were to be restored immediately to their legal owners.<sup>16</sup> Charlemagne himself seems to have been worried about the problem as well, for in his memorandum of 811 he asked:

In which canon or in the rule of which holy father does it say that someone can become either cleric or monk against his will, or where is a teaching of Christ to be found or a preaching of his apostles in which it is said that community of canons or monks can be constituted from unwilling, obstinate or servile people?<sup>17</sup>

The matter could not have been put more succinctly: obviously the ranks of the clergy were swelling with unfit people while greedy bishops and abbots shut their eyes to the problem, or even worse. In the assessment of suitability for monastic life, social status played a major role: the memorandum just mentioned spoke emphatically of *viles personae*, and warned that the quality of the clergy was more important than its

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<sup>14</sup> *Admonitio generalis*, c. 73, MGH Capit. I, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Council of Frankfurt (a. 794), c. 16, MGH. Conc. II,1, p. 168; *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818-819), c. 8, MGH Capit. I, p. 277; see also Semmler, ‘Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils’, pp. 46-7.

<sup>16</sup> Council of Chalon (a. 813), c. 7, MGH Conc. II,1, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractanda* (a. 811), c. 10, MGH Capit. I, p. 163: ‘In quo canonum vel in cuius sancti patris regula constitutum sit, ut invitatus quislibet aut clericus aut monachus fiat, aut ubi Christus praecepisset aut quis apostolus praedicasset ut de nolentibus et invitatis et vilibus personis congregatio fieret in ecclesia vel canonicorum vel monachorum’. Cf. Ganshof, ‘Note sur les “Capitula”’.

quantity. Serfs were being forced to be tonsured or veiled at an alarming scale, with or without their lord's approval.<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, the emperor and his advisors considered conversion a matter of personal choice – but did their concern extend as far as child oblates? After all, the wishes of children were completely disregarded in the very Rule that was being raised to a position of supremacy. It looks as if quite other standards applied to child oblates. A capitulary addressed to the *missi* in 789 shows as much. Its first sixteen chapters alluded to the Benedictine Rule, with some extensive prescriptions and others merely giving the title of the Rule's relevant chapter, as a kind of memory-jogger. Here, novices and oblates were distinguished from each other: of novices it was stated that 'no-one may be forced against his will to take the vow', while child oblates were only referred to by the short notice *de filiis nobilium qui offeruntur*, that is, the incomplete title of the Rule's prescription on oblation.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, adult novices and child oblates belonged to different categories; repeated references to chapter 59 of the Rule indicate that its stringent version of child oblation was gaining ground.<sup>20</sup>

At times it seems as if the continuous emphasis on monastic conversion being voluntary did have repercussions for children as well. The relevant legislation is ambiguous and contradictory, however. For example, the council of Mainz (813) prohibited monks and secular clergy from receiving tonsure 'except at the legitimate age and of their own free will, or with the permission of their lord'.<sup>21</sup> It is hard to make

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<sup>18</sup> *Capitulare missorum generale* (a. 802), c. 16, MGH Capit. I, p. 94; Council of Mainz (a. 813), c. 23, MGH Conc. II,1, p. 267.

<sup>19</sup> *Duplex legationis edictum* (a. 789), cc. 11-2, MGH Capit. I, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> See also *Capitula ad lectionem* ... (a. 802), c. 23, MGH Capit. I, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> Council of Mainz (a. 813), c. 23, MGH Conc. II,1, p. 267: 'De clericis iniuste tonsuratis. De clericis vero hoc statuimus, ut hi, qui hactenus inventi sunt, sive in canonico sive in monachico ordine, tonsorati sine eorum voluntate, si liberi sunt, ut ita permaneant, et deinceps cavendum, ut nullus tondatur nisi legitima aetate et spontanea voluntate vel cum licentia domini sui'. Boswell detected 'semantic difficulties' here, stating that 'si liberi sunt' may also mean 'if they are children'; furthermore, he found the phrase about the lord 'most puzzling – does it mean that a feudal superior could authorize oblation while a parent could not, or does "lord" apply to parents, taking the traditional authority of the *paterfamilias* as a kind of *dominium*?' (Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 244, n. 52.). I fail to see any difficulties here. 'Si liberi sunt' does not translate as 'if they are children' in medieval sources; the decree was directed against monks and clerics being tonsured

out which age was deemed to be 'legitimate'; it may have been the fifteenth year – according to the Rule – or the twelfth if Frankish law was followed.<sup>22</sup> At first glance, this decree seems to be a clear-cut ban on children becoming monks or clerics under-age, until one reads the concluding statement in which the bishops recapitulated the decisions of all five councils convened in 813. This so-called *Concordia episcoporum* asserted that under-age children could receive the tonsure – or the veil – provided that this was done with the consent of parents or guardians. If these had not agreed, but failed to protest to the authorities within three years, the unauthorised tonsure was to be permanent. If the family submitted their claim within the period specified, they were to be awarded damages; moreover, it was within their power to determine whether the child should continue in the religious state or return to the world.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the bishops protected familial authority while completely ignoring the desires of the minors involved. This stringent approach was somewhat modified in legislation of 818-819, which also condemned all infringement upon the rights of the family, but allowed children who had meanwhile attained the *aetas legitima* to decide for themselves whether to return to the world or not.<sup>24</sup> But this only applied to children who had been tonsured or veiled without parental approval. 'Legitimate' child oblation was by no means outlawed. Nonetheless, in some quarters there was a real concern about children being forced into monastic life against their will. A capitulary for the *missi* of 805-806 forbade the veiling of girls 'before they can know what they want'.<sup>25</sup> No age limit is given,

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against their will. If they were free, they had to stay; if not, they were to be returned to their lord. Above all, the bishops were out to protect the rights of parents and lords which were infringed upon by those tonsuring minors and serfs. Only if those forcibly tonsured were free and of age, were they themselves considered the injured party.

<sup>22</sup> This was the age at which Frankish law allowed boys to take the vow and at which, since 802, all had been considered capable of taking an oath of allegiance to the emperor. Cf. *Capitulare missorum* (a. 792-793), c. 4, MGH Capit. I, p. 67; *Capitulare missorum generale* (a. 802), c. 2, *ibid.*, p. 92. See also *Capitula legi Salicae addita* (a. 819-820), c. 5, *ibid.*, p. 293, which prescribe that a boy under twelve years did not have to pay the fine (*fredus*).

<sup>23</sup> *Concordia episcoporum* (a. 813), c. 12, MGH Conc. I, 2, p. 298-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818-819), MGH Capit. I, c. 20, p. 278; *Capitula legibus addenda* (a. 818-819), c. 21, *ibid.*, p. 285. However, see the variant readings mentioned here under note t, which show that this stipulation remained controversial.

<sup>25</sup> *Capitulare in Theodonis villa datum* (a. 805-806), c. 14, MGH Capit. I, p. 122.

but the girls in question must have been quite young, for they are referred to as *infantulae*. If those issuing this capitulary had any precise age limit in mind, it must have been closer to twelve than to twenty-five. The latter age limit for the veiling of virgins was adhered to in fourth-century conciliar legislation.<sup>26</sup> When in the 780s these texts became known in the Carolingian realm such precepts were dutifully quoted, but they had little practical effect.<sup>27</sup> For example, the influential *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* of 818-819 repeated the age limit of twenty-five, but added that there was no objection to a bishop consecrating and veiling a virgin at a younger age, provided he did so at her family's request.<sup>28</sup>

The reforming councils held in Aachen in 816 and 817 tried to strike a balance between the irrevocability of child oblation and the principle that vows be voluntary. This was one of the issues that required lengthy deliberation, for a solution was reached only in 817:

The father and mother should offer a boy at the altar during the offertory of mass, and in the presence of lay witnesses they should draw up a *petitio* which the boy himself must confirm once he has attained the age of understanding.<sup>29</sup>

This decree attempted to uphold two conflicting principles: the right of parents to donate their child and the requirement that vows be voluntary. It is doubtful, however, whether contemporaries saw as much of a contradiction as later historians have. Some of these have concluded that the subsequent confirmation of the parental vow was an attempt to bring

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<sup>26</sup> *Canones in causa Aziarii*, c. 16, *Concilia Africae*, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> *Admonitio generalis* (a. 789), c. 46, MGH Capit. I, p. 57; Synod of Frankfurt (a. 794), c. 46, *ibid.*, p. 77; *Capitula ad lectionem* ... (a. 802), c. 18, *ibid.*, p. 108; *Capitulare missorum speciale* (a. 806?), c. 19, *ibid.*, p. 103; Council of Tours (a. 813), c. 28, MGH Conc. II, 1, p. 290.

<sup>28</sup> *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818-819), c. 26, MGH Capit. I, p. 279.

<sup>29</sup> *Synodi secundae decreta authentica* (a. 817), c. 17, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 477: 'Ut puerum pater et mater altari tempore oblationis offerant et petitionem pro eo coram laicis testibus faciant quam et tempore intelligibili ipse puer confirmet'. This prescription found its way into various collections of decrees incorporating the reform legislation of Aachen: cf. *Regula S. Benedicti Anianensis sive Collectio Capitularis*, c. 48, *ibid.*, p. 529; *Collectio capitularis Benedicti Levitae monastica*, c. 36, *ibid.*, p. 549; *Collectio sancti Martialis Lemovicensis, Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, c. 50, *ibid.*, p. 560.

about an essential liberalisation of the practice of oblation,<sup>30</sup> while others judged that mere lip service was being paid to voluntary entry into monastic life.<sup>31</sup> If one only goes by the prescription itself both theories seem plausible, for its wording is ambiguous and open to conflicting interpretations. In the broader context of ninth-century monasticism, however, neither seems to make much sense. Given other aspects of child oblation – such as the solemnity of the oblation ritual and the transfer of the child's property to the monastery – it is not likely that oblates could retract their parents' promise. All the same, their personal commitment to monastic life was valued highly; their confirmation of their parents' pious gift at a later date was definitely more than an empty gesture. Monastic educators must have hoped that children would gradually interiorise the obligations undertaken for them by their parents, as indeed happened to abbot Folcuin of Lobbes (d. a. 990). In later life he described how his parents had made him into a monk, 'albeit, alas, only externally'.<sup>32</sup> The act of oblation was indeed meant to be immediate and irrevocable, but the child still had to become a monk or nun in the full sense of the word, and this took time. This was the reason why the *aetas intelligibilis* was not specified. Monastic educators knew that to some, understanding might come soon, while in others it took a long time to develop.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the Aachen reform councils attempted to deal with the issue of child oblation. The problems faced by male and female communities were partly the same, centering upon the question whether others than oblates should be accepted. The reformers' answer was an unequivocally negative one. No boys should be sent to monastic schools unless they were proper oblates.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, abbesses were confronted with parents treating the convent as a finishing school, as they had done since the

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<sup>30</sup> Calmet, *Commentarius*, ad c. 59; Delatte, *Commentaire*, p. 467; Riepenhoff, *Zur Frage des Ursprungs*, pp. 144–8. Semmler, 'Benedictus II', pp. 50–1. Semmler suggests that in the first decades of the ninth century enlightened lay persons attempted to make entry into monastic life completely voluntary, while a conservative group of monks held steadfastly to the validity of the parental promise. I think this simplifies matters too much; see below, chapter VII, § 4.

<sup>31</sup> Seidl, *Die Gott-Verlobung*, p. 43; Mabillon, *Vetera Analecta*, p. 157.

<sup>32</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 107, p. 629: '... sancto Bertino oblatulus, monachum, pro dolor! facie tenus, sum effectus'.

<sup>33</sup> De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery', p. 108–9.

<sup>34</sup> *Synodi secundae decreta authentica* (a. 817), c. 5, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 474.

days of Caesarius of Arles.<sup>35</sup> As a capitulary of 803-804 put it, everyone had the right to donate a daughter, a granddaughter or a female relative to the Almighty, but under no circumstances was the monastery to serve as an educational facility where girls could be placed on a temporary basis.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, the reformers were more interested in boys than in girls, and their prescriptions reveal some profound dissimilarities between male and female monasticism. The latter displayed some quite specific irregularities: if needed, convents served as nurseries, where even boys were brought to be raised. This had been a familiar phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon monasteries. Carolingian royal and ecclesiastic authority strongly objected to these arrangements,<sup>37</sup> but young boys still found their way to the motherly care of nuns. The orphan Paschasius Radbertus (born c. 800) was brought up in the convent of St Mary at Soissons, feeling deeply grateful to Abbess Theodrada and her community for the rest of his life.<sup>38</sup> More importantly: the reformers' efforts to regularise child oblation along the lines of Benedict's Rule, including the oblate's confirmation of his parents' vows, were entirely directed towards boys. No formalised assent whatsoever was demanded from girls; on the contrary, the main problem in nunneries seem to have been the familiar one of parents reclaiming their oblate daughters as a matter of fact. Conversely, the decree against veiling girls before they knew what they wanted<sup>39</sup> may have been directed as much against parents personally forcing the veil upon their daughters as against bishops or abbesses performing this ritual. In other words, it looks as if the regularisation of nunneries did not rank very high on the reforming agenda; moreover, young nuns remained more closely tied to their families of origin than boys did. As Janet L. Nelson put it:

In practice, then, oblation worked to forge, and reinforce, on-going relationships between landed families and particular churches. Dynasties, in fact, were consolidated around cult-sites, and families defined them-

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<sup>35</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 7, 4, p. 186.

<sup>36</sup> *Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz data* (a. 803-804), c. 6, MGH Capit. I, p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> Beda Venerabilis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV, c. 8, p. 358; *Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz data* (a. 803-804), c. 7, MGH Capit. I, p. 119. Against double monasteries and in favour of curtailing the power and liberty of abbesses: *Concilium Vernense* (a. 755) c. 5, MGH Capit. I, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio*, Introduction, pp. v-vi.

<sup>39</sup> See above, n. 25.



selves as founders and/or patrons of churches in which their ascendants and close collaterals (*genealogia*), and their descent-line (*progenies*), would be permanently commemorated. To offer a boy to such an institution was to plan for the future. Girls were different, remaining at the heart of the family. They could be kept at home, or set up in what were, in fact, house-convents, which often lived no longer than their original inmates. The fact that there could be house-nuns, but not house-monks, reflected (*inter alia*) the firmer institutional definition of male communities.<sup>40</sup>

There was yet another factor, however, which made male monasticism a higher priority than its female counterpart. From the late eighth century onwards, masses celebrated in ascetic communities had become increasingly important; accordingly, the proportion of monks in orders had steadily risen.<sup>41</sup> This obviously put female communities at a disadvantage. Whereas safeguarding female purity and female prayer had been a vital issue to Merovingian ecclesiastical leaders,<sup>42</sup> their ninth-century successors – including the authors of commentaries on Benedict's Rule – concentrated upon boy oblates destined for the priesthood. Hence, their preoccupation with the so-called *scolastici*; the importance of the matter is revealed by the amount of time and deliberation needed to reach agreement. An anonymous participant in the discussions of 816 reported back that the meeting had already taken a decision regarding the acceptance of novices but not where priests and *scolastici* were concerned.<sup>43</sup> The latter comprised all boys who received their training in the monastic schools – child oblates as well as young secular clergy and the odd lay boy. Indeed, the capitulary of 816 could not yet issue a decree on the matter, which was only resolved a year later: henceforth,

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<sup>40</sup> Nelson, 'Parents, children and the church', p. 110; cf. Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, pp. 114-5.

<sup>41</sup> See below, chapter IV, § 2.

<sup>42</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 305; see above, chapter I, § 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Statuta Murbacensia*, c. 20, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 447: 'De sacerdotibus vero vel scolasticis suscipiendis preceptum synodi non habemus; et ideo susceptio eorum regularis quantum possibilitas sinit habeatur, usquedum decretum manifestius inde audiatur'. This document owes its name to the oldest manuscript originating from Murbach, but is in fact a report made for an unidentified monastic community, completed even before the discussions of 816 were concluded. See Semmler, 'Zur Überlieferung', pp. 321-32.

the monastery school would be for child oblates only.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the special treatment which oblates received in some monasteries was curtailed in that they were forbidden to eat meat, except when they were ill.<sup>45</sup>

Opinion prevailed in favour of keeping all temporary inhabitants out of the cloister, including young clerics receiving a training. All members of the community had to subject themselves to the strictures of the monastic state, which included stability as well as an ascetic diet. This was in keeping with the overall trend of the Aachen councils, which aimed at a clear distinction between monastic and canonical life, and at safeguarding the cloister against secular intrusion. Any liberalisation of child oblation would have run counter to these objectives; this in itself makes it very unlikely that the oblate's confirmation of the parental vow was a matter of choice. Moreover, the decree of 817 was the very first to clearly advocate Benedict's ritual of child oblation, stating that it should take place at the altar during the Offertory of mass. Such a solemn rite was not to be made light of by the personal whim of the oblate.

The fact that a precept of this kind was still deemed necessary in 817 shows that the introduction of Benedictine child oblation must have been as slow as the diffusion of the controversial Office of Benedict. In the age of the 'mixed rules' the ritual of entry into religious life was extremely varied. This diversity the Aachen reformers tried to eradicate, and they met with considerable opposition. Adalhard of Corbie fought Benedict of Aniane over the duration of the novitiate,<sup>46</sup> and child oblation seems to have been a hot issue as well. In the end, the reforming party triumphed, which is not to say that they succeeded in imposing their views on all monasteries alike. Some opted for the canonical rule in order to gain more liberty,<sup>47</sup> while others may have quietly abided by their own traditions without anyone noticing. But the reformers were nothing if not zealous, and sent out *missi* charged with checking compliance with their decisions. One of those was Abbot Smaragdus of St Mihiel, who in the course of his duties as a *missus*

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<sup>44</sup> *Synodi secundae decreta authentica* (a. 817), c. 5, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 474.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 21. p. 477.

<sup>46</sup> Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, pp. 141-2; Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', pp. 47-9.

<sup>47</sup> Semmler, 'Benedictus II'.

wrote a commentary on the Rule of Benedict.<sup>48</sup> The very need for such commentaries indicates that things had changed; once the Rule of Benedict was accepted as the sole standard for monastic life, its admirable brevity made interpretation as well as elaboration all the more necessary.

### 3. THE COMMENTATORS: SMARAGDUS AND HILDEMAR

The Carolingian commentaries on the Rule may be regarded as the predecessors of the Benedictine *consuetudines* of the tenth and eleventh centuries. They differ from these later customs in that their authors provided a sentence-by-sentence – and often word-by-word – commentary on the Rule. Older monastic traditions were liberally incorporated insofar as they were considered to bear some resemblance to the Rule. The leading reformer himself, Benedict of Aniane, initiated and stimulated this approach: in his *Codex regularum* he compiled a multitude of monastic rules, and his *Concordia regularum* was intended to highlight similarities between Benedict's precepts and those of other authors. With this aim he quoted Basil and Isidore as well as Aurelian of Arles concerning child oblation, and – at great length – the Master.<sup>49</sup> He also included an interpolation which does not appear in Isidore's original text:

Everyone brought by his own parents to the monastery should know that he must remain there forever. For when Samuel had been born and weaned Hannah offered him as a gift in God's honour, according to her promise; he persisted in the service of the temple for which his mother had destined him, and he completed his service in the place to which he had been vowed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Smaragdus wrote his commentary immediately after council of 816; it is even possible that he started on it before the last discussions were concluded. See Eberhardt, *Via Regia*, pp. 52-7.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict of Aniane, *Concordia regularum*, c. 66, cols. 1301-14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 66, col 1308: 'Quicumque a parentibus propriis in monasterio fuerit delegatus, noverit se ibi perpetuo permansurum. Nam Anna Samuel puerum natum et ablactatum Deo pietate, qua voverat, obtulit; quique in ministerio templi, quo a matre fuerat functus, permansit, et ubi constitutus est, deservivit'. Whether this interpolation originated early on in Spain or later on in Frankish monasticism remains a moot point; given the fact that Isidore's rule dates from 615-624, it may have been added after the council of Toledo of 633, which affirmed the irrevocability of the

Benedict of Aniane seems to have been none too worried about this strict view of oblation conflicting with more lenient ones such as that of Basil of Caesarea, and made no effort at reconciliation. Smaragdus, who used Benedict's *Concordia* as a source, took a different line. He too quoted Basil, but left out all passages revealing that Basil did not consider child oblation as binding – immediately adding the interpolation to Isidore's rule.<sup>51</sup> His views are clear: the oblation of a child should be regarded as irrevocable.

In accordance with the Aachen legislation, Smaragdus held that the *parentes* mentioned in the Rule could only be the child's father and/or mother.<sup>52</sup> He also warned those who retained the usufruct of a gift accompanying oblation: they should make compensation by donating part of the income to the monastery.<sup>53</sup> His principal personal contribution was, however, to include a model for the oblation charter (*petitio*). This text was in all likelihood formulated by the Aachen council of 817.<sup>54</sup> Its wording shows that the reforming councils had no intention to treat the oblate's right of personal confirmation as a licence to leave the monastery. Parents were to hand over their child in such a way 'that he is no longer permitted from that day onward to throw off the yoke of the Rule'.<sup>55</sup> But in practice Smaragdus was all too often faced with young monks who preferred the world to the monastery, for he makes the passing comment that 'although such a thing seldom happened then

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parental vow.

<sup>51</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 3, p. 300. Cf. Basil, *Regula a Rufino latine versa*, c. 7, pp. 38-40. The most crucial passage left out is c. 7, 2-3, answering the question from which age children could be offered to God, and at which age they could make their vow of virginity: '... omne tempus a prima aetate opportunum quidem esse ducimus ad suscipiendum in eruditione et timore domini; firma tamen tunc erit professio virginitatis, ex quo adulta iam aetas esse coeperit et ea quae solet nuptiis apta deputari ac perfecta'. This clearly contradicted the Carolingian irrevocability of the parental vow, and was therefore omitted from Smaragdus' commentary.

<sup>52</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 3, p. 300: 'Hinc datur intellegi, quia parentes non alios quam patrem aut matrem qui eum genuerunt dicit; quia Anna Samuelem quem genuit ipsa et non alius eum servitutum in templo domino obtulit'.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 59, 5, p. 300: '*Usus fructum* dicit quod nos dicimus usum fructuarium, id est illas res donent monasterio per testamentum sibi usu fructuario reservato. De quibus rebus solvant omni anno sibi indictum censum'.

<sup>54</sup> See below, ch. III, § 1.

<sup>55</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 8, p. 302: '... ita ut ab hac die iam non liceat illi collum desub regulae excutere iugo ...'.

(i.e. in Benedict's time), we know that it occurs frequently nowadays'.<sup>56</sup> The gulf between theory and practice was evidently quite wide; unfortunately this brief remark is all the information Smaragdus offers on this source of tension.

In his *Expositio* Hildemar strikes a more personal note. His was the work of an enthusiastic and talkative schoolmaster providing detailed commentary on every sentence of the Rule. This has come down to us in different versions which all go back to lecture notes of his pupils in the monastery of Civate in Northern Italy.<sup>57</sup> Hildemar's commentary has been rightly called a textbook of Carolingian monastic life, for its author drew on ample experience; he was a widely travelled monk from Corbie who ended his life as schoolmaster in Civate.<sup>58</sup> A certain measure of independence with regard to authoritative texts is not unusual in Hildemar. For example, he explained that the word *nobiles* in the title of Benedict's chapter on oblation was to be read as 'the rich' (*divites*), even though Scripture explains it differently, for experience taught that many of noble birth had become impoverished while others of more

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 59, 6, p. 301: 'Quod si tunc rare fiebat, nunc vero factum nos frequentissime esse cognoscimus'.

<sup>57</sup> The oldest manuscript of the most extensive version (ed. R. Mittermüller, 1880) stems from eleventh-century Dijon; the text begins with 'Incipit traditio super regulam sancti Benedicti, quam magister Hildemarus tradidit et docuit discipulis suis'. Paris BN lat. 12637, fol. A. I have compared this with the relevant passages from Mittermüller's edition, but have found no significant variants. A second, more abbreviated versions was formerly attributed to Paulus Diaconus (*Pauli Warnefridi Diaconi Casinensis Commentarium in Regulam Sancti Benedicti*, Monte Cassino 1880); a third one, the so-called *Recensio Basilii abbatis*, is again more extensive, but goes no further than RB c. 61. Variants not occurring in the two other version have been edited by Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, pp. 116-43. I have consulted two ninth-century manuscripts originating from Reichenau and comprising the integral *Recensio Basilii*: Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, Aug. 179 and 103. All three versions belong to the ninth century, in spite of the fact that the manuscripts of the extensive version edited by Mittermüller are of a relatively late date. Probably the three versions were based upon various written records of Hildemar's verbal commentary. Cf. Zelzer, 'Überlegungen zu einer Gesamtedition'; De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery', p. 124, n. 3. The erroneous attribution of Hildemar's commentary to Paul the Deacon is quite persistent, as appears from Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 249-51, and Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings*, p. 111, n. 18; most likely both authors have followed Schroll's *Benedictine Monasticism as Reflected in the Warnefrid-Hildemar Commentaries*.

<sup>58</sup> Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', p. 81.

humble origins had attained great wealth.<sup>59</sup> This aside sheds an intriguing light on ninth-century social mobility as well as on Hildemar's common sense. Of course the temptation to leave the monastery was by far the greatest for the children of the rich, whatever their origin.

He was just as informative when it came to explaining other aspects of child oblation. Hildemar shared Smaragdus's opinion that *parentes* could only refer to the natural parents, but added that the vow taken on behalf of the child was the father's prerogative. Only if he were deceased was the mother allowed to perform the act of oblation.<sup>60</sup> At the same time he defined more clearly the notion of *puer minor aetate*: this expression, he said, referred to any boy who was not able to take monastic vows according to the law which his parents lived by.<sup>61</sup> It made sense for Hildemar to uphold the principle of personality of the law, for he dictated his commentary in Italy, where various written legal traditions coexisted. Understandably, Hildemar did not specify the age at which a boy was old enough to 'promise' (*profiteri*). The Germanic codes do not give a minimum age for monastic vows but they do so for taking the oath, setting it at either twelve or fifteen.<sup>62</sup> These ages roughly coincide with the onset of puberty, so probably Hildemar had oblates in mind who had not yet reached that stage of life. His commentary says nothing of a minimum age for acceptance into the monastery,

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<sup>59</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 548: 'Nobiles enim appellat divites, quamquam scriptura divina appellet nobiles liberos, quia solent multi pauperes esse nobiles genere, eo quod de nobili genere sunt orti. Et iterum solent multi divites ignobiles esse, i.e. quia de rustica progenie sunt nata'.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Parentes enim nominat solummodo partem et matrem, quia parentes de patre et matre dicuntur a pariendo. Quod enim dicit: *faciant petitionem, quam supra diximus*, ita intelligitur, in qua dicitur *de stabilitate sua et conversione morum suorum et oboedientia* et reliqua. Ita faciendum est: debet, si pater est vivus, dicere pater; si autem mortuus est, dicere mater, nam alius propinquus non debet, i.e.: *Promitto ego ille coram Deo et sanctis ejus pro filio meo de stabilitate sua et de conversione morum suorum atque oboedientiam habendam*; et debet habere petitionem scriptam et promissionem in manu pro filio suo'.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Puerum non dicit illum cujus aetas ab octavo inchoatur anno, sed illum puerum vocat, qui per se non potest profiteri secundum legem, quoniam parentes vivunt'. The incomprehensible *quoniam* should be read as *quam*, as is shown by Paris BN ms. lat 12637, fol. 147r and Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek, ms. Aug. CIII, fols. 161r-161v.

<sup>62</sup> *Lex Burgundionum*, c. 87, p. 108; *Lex Ribuariorum*, c. 84, p. 130; *Lex Salica*, version D, c. 30, l. 1, p. 71; *Capitulare missorum*, c. 4, MGH Capit. I, p. 67; *Capitula legi Salicae addita*, c. 6, MGH Capit. I, p. 293.

although the care of very young children must have been a burden which monks would have preferred to avoid. Nonetheless, Hildemar spoke of three and four-year olds being present in the monastery as if they were nothing out of the ordinary.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly he considered these children, younger and older, bound to monastic life forever. He stated emphatically that the *petitio* submitted by the parents should be identical in form and content to that of adult novices. In other words, both documents should contain the same irrevocable vows: stability, *conversio morum* and obedience.<sup>64</sup> Hildemar's interpretation of the 'alm' (*elemosina*) which the parents might present to the monastery is equally uncompromising: this had to consist of the child's entire inheritance. Parents who wished to keep the usufruct during their lifetime were morally bound to make a supplementary gift, thus compensating the community for a temporary loss of revenue.<sup>65</sup>

Once the children had entered the community a lot of energy was devoted to their care and upbringing; Hildemar reckoned with three to four masters being in charge of some ten children.<sup>66</sup> The amount of attention he lavished on them shows that they made up a large section of the community, enjoying a special status and receiving extra care. Against the decree of 817 forbidding child oblates to eat meat stands Hildemar's recommendation to give them plenty of it, especially when they were still very young or showed the slightest sign of weakness; moreover, they should be fed fish, butter and eggs until they were strong enough to do without.<sup>67</sup> Obviously, things had changed very much since Benedict's days, when children only merited limited attention and

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<sup>63</sup> While discussing food regulations, Hildemar allowed the youngest children — of three and four years old — most meat: 'Hoc notandum est, quia iuxta tempus aetatis suae debet illis tribuere carnes quadrupedum, eo quod plus indiget et opus est, cum in tertio anno est, carnes manducare, deinde in quarto minus, et in quinto plus minus ...'. *Expositio*, c. 37, p. 419.

<sup>64</sup> See above, n. 51. Hildemar used the threefold vow, in compliance with the instructions of the Aachen reformers, but the original *conversatio morum* of the Rule remained problematic, and the expression *conversio morum* was therefore substituted. See Herwegen, *Geschichte der benediktinischen Profeßformel*, p. 57-67.

<sup>65</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 550: '... si hoc noluerint facere, hoc est si eum exheredare de rebus suis noluerint, sed voluerint ejus portionem offerre in monasterium, tunc offerant etiam ejus portionem cum ipso infantulo'.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, pp. 331-2, 337; c. 37, p. 418; c. 63, p. 581; c. 70, p. 621. See De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery'.

<sup>67</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 37, p. 419.

hardly any special treatment. Between the sixth and the ninth century, child oblation had become institutionalised. Instead of being a minority, oblates now formed a sizeable group within the community; as will become clear, they even represented the majority amongst recruits to monastic life.

#### 4. CHILD OBLATION AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT

In spite of all possible countermeasures, a number of oblates left the monastery after all, either compelled by their parents or of their own volition. Smaragdus complained that this happened 'very frequently',<sup>68</sup> but only a few of the more notorious runaways have left traces in written records. The undisputed *cause célèbre* is that of Gottschalk (d. 866/870), who became famous not only for challenging the legitimacy of his oblation in 829 but also for defending heretical ideas on predestination which would ultimately cost him his hard-fought liberty and his health.<sup>69</sup> Much less well-known is the case of Lambert of Schienen who also attempted to invalidate his oblation and succeeded in winning Pope Nicholas I (858-867) to his cause. The sources relating to their legal wrangles are of tremendous value for the study of child oblation, for their complaints about irregularities as well as the counter-arguments of their opponents reveal what people at the time thought a 'regular' oblation should be like. Both norm and deviations are clearly indicated.

##### A. Hrabanus Maurus

Gottschalk's opponent – in 829 as well in 848 when the conflict over predestination broke out – was Hrabanus Maurus.<sup>70</sup> He started monastic life as a child oblate as well; his oblation and subsequent career merit some attention, for they influenced his attitude towards Gottschalk.

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<sup>68</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 6, p. 301.

<sup>69</sup> Vielhaber, *Gottschalk der Sachse*; Rädle, 'Gottschalk der Sachse'; Freise, 'Einzugsbereich'; Nineham, 'Gottschalk of Orbais'; Ganz, 'The debate on predestination'. L. Traube's preface to the edition of Gottschalk's *Carmina* remains the best compilation of biographical data, however; cf. Traube (ed.), *Godescalci Carmina*, MGH Poet. lat. III, 2, pp. 707-724.

<sup>70</sup> See especially the 1982 volume on *Hrabanus Maurus: Lehrer, Abt und Bischoff*; furthermore, Kottje, 'Hrabanus Maurus – "Praeceptor Germaniae"?', and Kottjes excellent biographical survey in the *Verfasserlexikon*, 'Hrabanus Maurus'.



Hrabanus entered Fulda as a boy and rose to eminence as its brightest young scholar; in 798-799 he was sent for further training to Charlemagne's court and to Alcuin in Tours.<sup>71</sup> The latter gave him his nickname 'Maurus', after Benedict's most beloved pupil who had also been a child oblate.<sup>72</sup> In various letters and poems Alcuin addressed his clever pupil as *puer Benedicti Maurus*.<sup>73</sup> Already before Alcuin's death in 804 Hrabanus started his activities as teacher in Fulda's school, being elevated to the priesthood ten years later; from 818 onwards he became a prolific author who would come to be regarded as Alcuin's intellectual and spiritual heir, invested with all of his great authority. Hrabanus combined his busy writing with other arduous duties: in 818 he became head of Fulda's school, succeeding Eigil to the abbacy in 822 – a sequence which indicates how very central the school was to Fulda. His turbulent career was crowned when Louis the German made him archbishop of Mainz in 847, an office which he held till his death in 856.

The dates of Hrabanus' birth and oblation have given rise to some controversy. If we assume that he played by his own rules and was at least thirty at his priestly ordination in 814, he must have been born before 784.<sup>74</sup> As to his oblation, his disciple Rudolf merely noted that Hrabanus 'from boyhood' (*a pueritia*) had applied himself industriously to the study of Holy Scripture, a hagiographical cliché which reveals nothing about his entry into Fulda.<sup>75</sup> Hrabanus himself referred to this in the inscription for his own gravestone, but only briefly:

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<sup>71</sup> Schaller, 'Der junge "Rabe"'.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, II, c. 3, 14, p. 150; c. 7, 1-3, pp. 156-8.

<sup>73</sup> Alcuin, *Carmina*, no. 51, 2, p. 264; idem, *Epistolae*, no. 142, p. 223. See also Hrabanus' own letter no. 14, p. 413, where he states that 'meus magister beatae memoriae Albinus' named him Maurus.

<sup>74</sup> Freise, 'Zum Geburtsjahr', pp. 18-48. Hrabanus was ordained a deacon in 801 and a priest in 814; see the *Chronicon Laurissense breve*, c. 5.1, p. 38. According to Rudolf of Fulda, *Miracula* (c. 15, p. 340) Hrabanus had told him that he was about 30 years old when he wrote *De laudibus sancti crucis*. This is confirmed by the preface, which states that Hrabanus had completed 'sex lustra'; Hrabanus, *Carmina*, no. 1, p. 160. Hrabanus wrote this poem before attaining the priesthood, for in the address of his dedicatory letter to Haito of Reichenau he called him his 'fellow deacon' (*conlevita*); Hrabanus, *Epistolae* no. 1, p. 381. See also Sandmann, 'Die Folge der Äbte', p. 185.

<sup>75</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Miracula*, c. 15, pp. 340-1.

In this town [i.e. Mainz] I was born, and re-born from the sacred font of baptism;  
 then I became acquainted with Holy Scripture in Fulda where, made monk, I obeyed the orders of my superiors,  
 and the Holy Rule was the guideline of my life.<sup>76</sup>

This is the epitaph of a man who grew up in monasticism, and who would remain a monk always, whatever duties called him away from the cloister. But when did he come to Fulda? It must have happened after 780/781, for he does not appear in the list of monks which was compiled in those years.<sup>77</sup> His name first crops up in two charters dated 25th May 788 in which his parents, Waluram and Waltrat, donated goods to Fulda. The first document is about the transfer of a property within the walls of Mainz, which contained the residence of the family; the donors reserved the usufruct for themselves and for Hrabanus. Only on the death of all three of them would the property devolve in its entirety upon the monastery. Here Hrabanus acted as third witness, after his parents but before his brothers and sisters.<sup>78</sup> The second charter records the donation of a property belonging to his mother, of which the monastery gained immediate and full possession. Again, Hrabanus was the main witness, signing directly after his parents.<sup>79</sup>

It stands to reason that these two charters were somehow connected to Hrabanus' oblation. This has been denied, however, on the grounds that he himself was to share in the usufruct, in direct contravention of the Rule's requirement that a child being offered should be shorn of any

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<sup>76</sup> Hrabanus, *Carmina*, no. 97, p. 244: 'Urbe quidem hac genitus sum ac sacro fonte renatus./In Fulda post haec dogma sacrum didici./Quo monachus factus seniorum iussa sequabar./Norma mihi vitae regula sancta fuit'.

<sup>77</sup> See Schmid et al. (eds.), *Die Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda*, vol. I, pp. 217-9 for list F1, headed by Abbot Baugulf; the list is dated by Schmid, 'Mönchslisten', pp. 573-83.

<sup>78</sup> *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda*, vol. I, no. 177, pp. 271-2: '... hoc est intus muro civitatis Mogontiae aream unam cum casa et cum omni aedificio, in qua nos commanere videamur, quod est de tribus partibus strata publica, quarta parte Zotani, ea vero ratione ut, dum ego Waluramnus et coniux mea Waltrat et filius noster Hrabanus, qui alium supervixerit, habeamus et post obitum nostrum supradicta ecclesia sancti Bonifatii vel custodes illius habendi, donandi, vendendi vel quicquidque exinde facere voluerint, liberam ac firmissimam in omnibus habeant potestatem ...'.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 178, p. 272: '... hoc est quod donamus in pago Uuormacinsae in villa, que dicitur Truthmaresheim, quicquid Uualtrat ibi videtur habere ...'.

kind of possession.<sup>80</sup> This is true enough, but nonetheless, Hrabanus' special position in both charters indicates that the gifts were somehow linked with his person. After all, in a double donation made in one day he figured as principal witness: after his parents, that is, but before his brother and sister. Such preferential treatment makes it very probable that Waluram and Waltrat indeed made this gift when they handed over their son to Fulda.<sup>81</sup>

There are several possible explanations for the discrepancy between the gift and the Rule of Benedict. Hrabanus may not have been taken in as a child oblate but as a pupil of Fulda's school; as his epitaph shows he was taught Holy Scripture before being made a monk. In this case, the gift could be considered as a kind of tuition fee. But more likely the two charters were indeed drawn up on the occasion of his oblation. There is no reason to suppose that Fulda at this early date was following Benedict's Rule to the letter; the Carolingian legislation discussed earlier shows how very slowly Benedictine child oblation gained acceptance, even in communities such as Fulda that professed themselves to live according to the Rule.<sup>82</sup> And even after the Aachen reforms some parents stipulated that donations of land should serve as a kind of *viaticum* for their oblate children. When a certain Rumolt transferred goods to St Gall in 837, he made his gift *ad monasterium*, but the income was expressly stated to be for the living expenses of his oblate son Erchanger.<sup>83</sup> A similar donation is known from ninth-century St Bertin, where a father on the eve of his death named a *puer oblatus* as

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<sup>80</sup> Freise, 'Zum Geburtsjahr', pp. 53-4. Freise supposes that Hrabanus's oblation may have occurred after 15 September 791, because he witnessed a charter relating to a donation by his relatives 'in publico'; this would have been incompatible with his status as an oblate. I fail to see why that should be so, especially given the fact that this charter was drawn up and witnessed in Fulda itself. Staab, on the other hand, connects Hrabanus' witnessing of donations in 791 and 801 with his tonsure and his becoming a deacon; 'Wann wurde Hrabanus Maurus Mönch', pp. 90-4. There seem to be no grounds for this conjecture. Both donations were made by relatives of Hrabanus, so it stands to reason that he was asked to act as a witness on behalf of Fulda.

<sup>81</sup> There is no reason, however, to suppose with Staab that the first donation represented the *oblato* mentioned in c. 59 of the Rule, and the second one the *elemosina*; cf. Staab, 'Wann wurde Hrabanus Mönch', pp. 97-8. The *oblato* referred to in the Rule means the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine.

<sup>82</sup> Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturm*, p. 93-6.

<sup>83</sup> *Urkundenbuch der Abtei Sankt-Gallen*, vol. I, no. 363, p.338.

co-beneficiary with his other children, granting part of his property 'to St Bertin to my son'.<sup>84</sup> In other words, Benedict's Rule was loosely interpreted, and why should Waluram and Waltrat have acted differently? This means that Hrabanus came to Fulda in 788, when he was eight years old at most – but probably younger.

### B. Gottschalk

Hrabanus grew up as pupil and confidant of Eigil, in whose footsteps he followed both as master of the school and as abbot. He was a dedicated teacher who complained that he could scarcely study because 'the care for the little ones' took practically all his time.<sup>85</sup> As a schoolmaster he may already have suspected that he was to cross swords with one of his brightest pupils. Gottschalk, the son of a Saxon count named Berno, was a precocious boy, full of intellectual curiosity. He was offered to Fulda during Ratger's abbacy, probably in or shortly before 814, as part of a *pro memoria* gift for his father Berno who had died recently. A good case for this date has been made by Freise, who pointed out that a *traditio* of property made to Fulda for the salvation of count Berno's soul might well be connected to Gottschalk's oblation.<sup>86</sup> This gift, which was large enough to serve as an inheritance,<sup>87</sup> occurred during Ratger's abbacy, that is between 802 and 817. If a fragment of a letter written by Hrabanus to Archbishop Otgar of Mainz also relates to the events of 829, these *termini* may be narrowed down even further. In this letter Hrabanus warned that the emperor Louis stood to lose goods he

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<sup>84</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 78, p. 621. Another case comes from Pistoia in Northern Italy, where in 784 two child oblates (living under the Rule of Benedict) acted as *codonatores* with their father at the occasion of a gift to the monastery of Santo Bartolomeo; cf. Migne PL 87, col. 1442.

<sup>85</sup> Hrabanus in a letter of 821-822 to Archbishop Haistulf of Mainz, *Epistolae*, no. 5, p. 389: '... et pro nutrimento parvulorum, quod non parvam nobis ingerit molestiam et lectionis facit iniuriam ...'.

<sup>86</sup> Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', pp. 1024-5. *Traditiones et antiquitates Fuldenses*, p. 97, c. 41, 35: 'Ego Helmtag in memoriam Berni comitis trado ad scm. Bon. sicut ipse mihi tradidit X. hubas et VIII mancipia'. Presumably, Helmtag acted as a go-between; his name is a Saxon men's name, cf. Schlaug, *Die altsächsischen Personennamen*, p. 103.

<sup>87</sup> Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1025, n. 136.

had inherited from his father.<sup>88</sup> If this indeed referred to Gottschalk's efforts to retrieve his inheritance, it follows that the property was transferred to Fulda before Charlemagne's death in 814, having become part of the royal abbey of Fulda which Louis inherited from his father.

Gottschalk, then, most likely came to Fulda before Charlemagne's death. Freise is non-plussed by the fact that a donation pertaining to Gottschalk's oblation was handed over only after Berno's death, and suggests that the parents handed over their son at an earlier stage, retaining usufruct until the father died. In other words, the *traditio* resulted from Fulda receiving the full rights to Gottschalk's *hereditas* at his father's death.<sup>89</sup> This argument does not seem conclusive, for as Hrabanus' case shows, retention of usufruct did by no means preclude the initial transfer of property rights to a monastery. But what if Gottschalk became a child oblate only after the death of Count Berno? This would yield a much better explanation for Gottschalk's oblation being connected to the donation *in memoriam Berni comitis*. In other words, both child and land may have served the purpose of Berno's *memoria*. If Gottschalk became an oblate after his father's death, with his mother playing a leading role, it also becomes clear why Hrabanus was so ready to counter the arguments of those who said an oblation should not be performed by a woman. He challenged his opponents on this point: would they dare to think Hannah insolent for having vowed Samuel to God without the consent or command of her husband?<sup>90</sup> Moreover, this also provides a context for the perplexing readiness of Gottschalk's *propinqui* to rush to his aid when he fought for his freedom. These may well have been his father's relatives, who had disagreed the proceedings surrounding Gottschalk's oblation in the first place.

All this must remain speculative, like much of Gottschalk's early years. He can be traced via Reichenau's *Liber confraternitatum*, for his name occurs in two lists of young monks who were not yet in clerical

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<sup>88</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 10, pp. 519-20: 'Praeterea sunt, ut nostis, possessiones istius monasterii et ecclesiae ad eam pertinentes proprietates dominicalis, quae domino imperatori ex paterna successione haereditario iure provenit, ideo timemus inde aliquid perdere'.

<sup>89</sup> Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1025.

<sup>90</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 428.

orders, dating from 822 and 825/826.<sup>91</sup> Shortly after 822 – the year in which Abbot Eigil died and Hrabanus succeeded him – Gottschalk made his profession and was tonsured – forcibly, as he was to contend later. The smouldering conflict between Gottschalk and his abbot ultimately became a matter of public concern, for in 829 a synod met in Mainz to hear Gottschalk's complaint that he had been made a monk in a most irregular fashion; he demanded restoration of his liberty and property.

Gottschalk's arguments are not wholly clear, for extant sources are contradictory on this point. Of Fulda's once enormous collection of letters only fragments remain, insofar as they were quoted by sixteenth-century church historians.<sup>92</sup> Whether these quotations are always literal remains uncertain; and most of them were taken from letters exchanged between the monk Hatto – the later abbot of Fulda – and Archbishop Otgar of Mainz, which yields a somewhat biased impression of things. Both Hatto and Otgar were staunch supporters of Gottschalk, agreeing that Hrabanus had imposed the vow and the monk's cowl (*cuculla*) on the boy, even going so far as forcibly tonsuring him. 'Against his will' (*invitus*) is the key word of these fragments.<sup>93</sup> The majority of the synod of 829 shared this view, granting Gottschalk his liberty.<sup>94</sup> But Hrabanus was ready to fight on. He addressed a lengthy treatise to

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<sup>91</sup> Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1026; Freise thinks that Gottschalk was tonsured between 826 and 828, because his name occurs in a list of recently tonsured monks that was sent to Reichenau in these years. This argument is circular, however, for the only reason to assume that the list indeed contained recently professed monks is the fact that Gottschalk is included in it. More likely, Hrabanus imposed tonsure and profession upon him at a date closer to 822, for this happened in his *infantia*, or even in *primordio vitae suae* (Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 419); fragments of the Fulda letter collection speak of *pueritia* (*Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 529).

<sup>92</sup> Between 1559 and 1574 Flaccius Illyricus and his collaborators published the first extensive Lutheran church history in Basel, entitled *Ecclesiastica historia ... secundum singulas centurias*; they still had the letter collection of Fulda at their disposal and abundantly quoted from it. These quotes have been edited by E. Dümmler as an appendix to Hrabanus's letters (Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, pp. 517-33).

<sup>93</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 529: 'In hoc tamen recte sensit (Hatto), quod iudicavit, neminem debere invitum fieri monachum, ideoque Godescalcum pronunciavit a vinculo illo immunem, cum probasset se a Rabano coactum suscepisse cucullam'. 'Godescalcum in pueritia coegit (Rabanus) monasticum vitam suscipere, ut patet ex epistola Hattonis ad Otgarium'.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Cum adhuc abbas esset (Rabanus), Godescalcus eum in synodo accusavit, quod se invitum fecisset monachus, ac synodus Godescalcum absolvit'.

Emperor Louis, defending his position and countering Gottschalk's arguments.<sup>95</sup> These differ from the ones mentioned in the letters of Hatto and Otgar. If we are to believe Hrabanus, Gottschalk based his argumentation mainly on Saxon law, claiming that parents had no right to deprive a son of his freedom by committing him to the service of God, least of all when such an act was witnessed by members of another tribe. Gottschalk regarded his oblation as invalid because only Frankish witnesses had been present.<sup>96</sup> Supported by his relatives (*propinqui*) he clung to the notion of the personality of the law.<sup>97</sup>

So on which grounds did Gottschalk fight for his freedom – the irregularity of his oblation or his forced profession and tonsure? Probably he used both lines of attack, while opponents and supporters chose to emphasise one or the other. The fragmentary correspondence between Otgar and Hatto reveals that it was indeed the *paterna libertas* to which Gottschalk wished to be restored; in its final judgement, the synod of Mainz appealed not only to divine law but also to the *lex humana*, that is to say secular legislation.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, the bishops' main task was to pass judgement based on canon law, and here Gottschalk's claim that he had been forced to take a vow must have carried most weight. After all, in 826 a council chaired by Pope Eugenius forbade involuntary entry into monastic life, except as a punishment for crime.<sup>99</sup> It may be significant that the decision of the Mainz synod was reached by a meeting of bishops only (*in conventu sacerdotum*).<sup>100</sup> Were the abbots

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<sup>95</sup> *Liber de oblatione puerorum*; unfortunately, apart from one twelfth-century manuscript (Göttweig, Stiftsbibliothek cod. 58, 1r-11v) only fifteenth-century manuscripts of this treatise are extant. Cf. Kottje, 'Hrabanus Maurus', col. 192. None of these contain a dedicatory letter to the emperor.

<sup>96</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, col. 431: '... verbi gratia, dicunt quod super Saxonem nullus de Francorum aut Romanorum, aut ex alia qualibet gente, licet inter suos nobilis natu atque honestus conversatione habeatur, nisi Saxo testis esse possit. Hoc enim, aiunt, legem gentis suae pati not posse, ut alterius gentis homo in testimonio citetur ad infringendam legem libertatis suae'.

<sup>97</sup> The 'propinqui' are mentioned in *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 530.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Habita ratione cum in conventu sacerdotum secundum divina humanaque iura diligenti studio causa discuteretur, inventus est is, qui interpellabat, auctoritate canonica esse solvendus'.

<sup>99</sup> Council of Rome (a. 826), c. 32, MGH Conc. II, 2, p. 580.

<sup>100</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 530. There is no way to verify, however, that this is a precise rendering of the proceedings of the synod.

excluded on purpose? Understandably Hrabanus avoided the issue of the voluntary vow like the plague, for here lay his weak spot.<sup>101</sup> Instead, in his appeal to Louis he concentrated on the irrevocability of child oblation, ridiculing those who denied universal validity to Frankish law and Frankish witnesses.

The bitter conflict between Hrabanus and Gottschalk highlights the ambiguous nature of the Aachen legislation on child oblation. The oblate should confirm his oblation when he was old enough to comprehend – this much had been made clear. But the ‘age of understanding’ is not defined, and neither is the question answered whether a child could be compelled to assent to his parents’ wishes. Concerning adults, however, there was plenty of legislation stating that these should under no circumstance be forced into monastic life, and probably Gottschalk and his supporters used this to their advantage, extending the argument to a profession in boyhood.<sup>102</sup> This was the area of uncertainty on which discussion centred. Apparently, in Fulda the parental oblation was soon followed by the oblate’s personal profession, at which occasion he also received cowl and tonsure. One may well wonder whether those in charge waited until the child had matured enough to know what was going on. Gottschalk was forcibly tonsured when he was an *infans* or a *puer*, so he must still have been very young at the time. As the years passed and he really reached the age of understanding, it dawned on him that he might leave Fulda and its hated abbot by appealing to secular and ecclesiastical law alike, using its ambiguity in his favour. Meanwhile he had found powerful allies amongst his relatives, who were willing to support him.

By that time he had grown into an exceptionally self-willed and intelligent young man who was to become one of the most original theologians of his age. His behaviour must have been as extraordinary as his personality; few child oblates who had second thoughts can have had the stomach to put up a similar fight. In this respect, Gottschalk’s

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<sup>101</sup> He did argue, however, that the Israelites had donated their brothers, the Levites, to God; why should an adult (*maior*) then not have the right to do so with a *minor*? Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, col. 425.

<sup>102</sup> Apart from several capitularies already discussed, they may also have known the decree of the synod of Rome (826) just mentioned (see above, n. 99), which forbade involuntary entry into monastic life, except as a punishment for crime. The synod based itself on Pope Leo the Great, probably on his letter to Bishop Rusticus of Narbonne. Cf. Leo the Great, *Epistolae*, no. 167, c. 14-5, cols. 1207-8.



high birth was a factor to be reckoned with as well. Hrabanus was the offspring of parents owning extensive property, including a town house in Mainz, but Gottschalk was of even more exalted extraction: the son of a Saxon count who was undoubtedly a prominent and early supporter of Frankish might and Christianity. Gottschalk's name – 'child of God' – might indicate that his parents had destined him for religious life at birth, but he evidently retained a clear memory of his illustrious background. Possibly his early clashes with Hrabanus in the schoolroom also had to do with differences of status; it would not be the first nor the last time that noble young monks and nuns rebelled against superiors whom they considered their social inferiors.<sup>103</sup>

Initially, Gottschalk was successful, convincing the synod of 829 that his cause was a just one. On canonical grounds the bishops released him from his vow, and he was free to leave Fulda. Under secular law, Gottschalk's relatives had sued for damages, probably appealing to the 818/819 capitulary which forbade anyone tonsuring a minor without the consent of his parents or guardians.<sup>104</sup> If there indeed raged a controversy over Gottschalk having been donated by his mother, with the assent of his father Berno but after the latter's death, their case must have been all the better.<sup>105</sup> Apparently, Hrabanus' guilt could only be established if Gottschalk and his relatives confirmed their accusations under oath, an embarrassment that the synod wished to spare the abbot. Hrabanus was faced with two options. He could insist upon the oath, which might make him liable to pay compensation to his opponents. Alternatively he could refrain from requiring this oath, in which case

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<sup>103</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, lib. X, c. 15, pp. 501-5, has described the rebellion of 589 in Radegunde's convent in Poitiers, which had a lot to do with differences in status between the abbess and her nuns; cf. Scheibelreiter, 'Königstöchter im Kloster', about the rebellion; see also Ekkehard, *Casus sancti Galli*, cc. 69-70, pp. 146-8 about the proud young Victor who – aided by his *propinqui* – rebelled against abbot Craloh.

<sup>104</sup> *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818-89), c. 20, MGH Capit. I, p. 278; *Capitula legibus addenda* (a. 818-819), c. 21, *ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>105</sup> Admittedly, nothing of this is mentioned in the fragments of the Fulda letters, but then again, neither is Gottschalk's complaint that his oblation was witnessed only by Frankish witnesses. From Hrabanus's *Liber de oblatione* it may be inferred, however, that both issues played a role in the 'secular' part of the case.

there would be no compensation to pay.<sup>106</sup> Whatever Hrabanus decided to do, Gottschalk would be a free man.

This, however, was by no means the end of the affair. Hrabanus fought back with all possible means, obtaining Otgar's permission to appeal to the emperor – a logical step, for Fulda was a royal abbey.<sup>107</sup> The case was to be reviewed in the presence of Emperor Louis himself, and Bishop Otgar gave 'the abbots' leave to attend this council – which indicates that Hrabanus had found supporters among his colleagues.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, he stubbornly refused to restore Gottschalk's inheritance, even when Hatto appealed to Bishop Otgar on Gottschalk's behalf.<sup>109</sup> Here the effectiveness of the economic measures surrounding child oblation becomes clear. Gottschalk's whole inheritance had been handed over to Fulda, and although he had regained his *libertas*, retrieving his property was a different matter altogether.

In his appeal Hrabanus firmly situated child oblation in the domain of divine authority. Only once did he venture on non-biblical territory. When refuting the assertion that a Saxon could not be deprived of his liberty by non-Saxons, he equated the Frankish empire with that of Persia and Rome. If throughout history all peoples had subjected themselves to the laws of great empires, what did the Saxons think they were doing in rejecting Franks of noble birth as witnesses? But after this nice example of Frankish imperialist reasoning, he quickly retreated to more familiar ground. If only the testimony of members of one's own *gens* were valid, why then have other nations accepted the testimony of

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<sup>106</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 530: 'Ac per hoc eorum iudicio paternae restitutus est libertati: ea tamen ratione, ut, si abbati ita placeret, controversiae eorum finis inter eos istius ac propinquorum suorum esset iuramentum; quod quidem si abbas suscipere vellet, omnem ei iniuriam, quam perpessus est, secundum legem componeret; si autem ille iuramentum nollet exigere, nec iste compositionem suae quaereret iniuriae, sed tantum legitima frueretur libertate ...'.

<sup>107</sup> Semmler, 'Pippin III und die fränkischen Klöster', pp. 115-9; Schmid, 'Die Frage nach den Anfängen'.

<sup>108</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 29, p. 529: 'Sed Rabanus contra eam sententiam appellavit anno Domini 829. Epistola Hattonis ad Otgarium'; p. 530: 'Sed Rabanus cum Otgarii licentia appellavit ad synodo, in quo praesto esset imperator: ut patet ex eius epistola ad Otgarium. Licebat tamen abbatibus ab episcopo ad principem et concilium provocare, ut apparet ex Rabani epistola ad Otgarium de causa Saxonis fugitivi monachi'.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 530: 'Otgarium Moguntinum archiepiscopum rogat (Hatto), ut Gotschalco sit adiumento, quo haereditatem ipsi negatam recipiat'.

the apostles and prophets, who were all Jews?<sup>110</sup> Hrabanus consistently drew his ammunition from the texts he held to be above all secular law: Scripture and patristic authority, from Genesis to Gregory the Great. Gottschalk is never mentioned, but the thrust of Hrabanus' argument was clearly aimed at him:

We have undertaken to write against those who say that it is not right for free parents to consecrate their freeborn children to the service of God, and against those who, counting as little the vow they once made to God, angrily reject the holy service that they have professed, as if they could abandon it without sin: they detest and despise the monastic life ordained according to the rules of the holy fathers, [regarding it] as established by human rather than by divine authority. We will first show by the testimony of sacred Scripture and the example of the fathers that it is licit to consecrate one's child to the service of God; then that a vow one has sworn to God cannot be abandoned without grave sin; finally, that monastic life was established not by human design but by divine authority.<sup>111</sup>

In an orderly fashion Hrabanus carried out this program, devoting the bulk of his treatise to the Old Testament models for child oblation. If Abraham and Jephtha were called upon to sacrifice their offspring by the sword, who could then object to parents offering their children only in a spiritual manner? Did not the Lord say to Moses, 'Thou shalt set apart for the Lord every firstborn that openeth the womb among the children of Israel, of men and cattle; all are mine'?<sup>112</sup> If the children of Israel

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<sup>110</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, cols. 431-2.

<sup>111</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 421: 'Sed quia negotium scribendi suscepimus adversus eos qui dicunt non licere parentibus liberis filios suos ingenuos Dei servitio mancipare, necnon et contra illos qui, parvi pendentes votum quod Deo voverunt, servitium sanctum quod professi sunt, quasi sine reatu deserere possent, indigne abjiciunt; monasticam quoque disciplinam secundum sanctorum Patrum regulas ordinatam, ceu humana inventionem, et non divina auctoritate institutam, despicientes detestantur; primo sacrarum Scripturarum testimoniis et sanctorum Patrum exemplis ostendemus, licere homini Christiano suam sobolem Deo consecrare: demum votum quod Deo vovetur, sine magno reatu omitti ominino non posse; postremo vitam monasticam non humana argumentatione, sed divina auctoritate institutam esse ...'.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 424: 'Sanctifica mihi omne primogenitum, quod aperit vulvam in filiis Israel, tam de hominibus quam de jumentis; mea sunt enim omnia'. This is not an exact quotation, but an amalgam of various biblical texts: Ex 13, 12-13, and Nm 3, 12-13, 8, 17-19. It comes closest to the texts from Numbers, however, where the

had been commanded to offer their brothers the Levites – who were their equals – to God, why then should not an adult do so with a minor?<sup>113</sup> Again, the fact that Hrabanus omits any reference to paternal authority – contending instead that a *minor* should obey the wishes of a *maior* – supports the hypothesis that it was Gottschalk's mother who performed the oblation. And so do his comments on Hannah, who of course is a crown witness:

I should like to know what these haters and detractors of child oblation have to say about this offering, which is almost identical to the oblation the blessed father Benedict established in his Rule ... Did they think that Hannah did so spurred on by a spirit of insolence, initially swearing this vow to God before the conception of the boy without the consent or command of her husband, as if she were legally capable? Then, after his birth – although with her husband's consent – it was nevertheless she who offered him faithfully to the Lord, and there diligently expounded to Eli the priest all the facts of her vow.<sup>114</sup>

Clearly, Hrabanus hit back at those who considered an oblation performed by a mother to be invalid, because a woman was not legally capable. For Hildemar this was no problem, as we have seen, although he only allowed the mother to act if the father was deceased. Presumably, something of the sort happened in Gottschalk's case – and it was used as an argument against Hrabanus, who retaliated effectively with the example of Hannah and Samuel. The New Testament yielded fewer suitable models, except for the prime one of Christ's presentation in the Temple. Hrabanus interpreted this as a straightforward case of child

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requirement that the firstborn to be offered – human and animal – be male is omitted. See also Ex 22, 28, 34, 20.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 425: 'Inter aequales enim saepe contradictio oritur, ne una pars alteram superet, aut servire cogatur: sed inter majorem et minorem nulla ratio existit, quod junior majoris imperio omnino se non subiceat'.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 427-8: 'Vellem scire, osores isti et contradictores oblationis regularis, quid de hac oblatione dicerent, quae pene consimilis est regulari oblationi, quam beatus Pater Benedictus in sua Regula constituit ... Utrum Annam proterviae spiritu incitatum hoc egisse arbitrentur quae, quasi propriae potestatis esset, sine viro consilio seu praecepto ante conceptum pueri primitus Deo votum vovit? Deinde post nativitatem eius, licet cum viri consensu, tamen ipsa eum Domino fiducialiter obtulit, atque Heli sacerdoti ibidem totum ordinem voti sui diligenter exposuit'.

The expression 'totum ordinem voti sui' is hard to translate. It may have a double meaning: not only that of 'all the facts' or 'the whole story' but also that of the 'orderly' or 'legitimate' nature of Hannah's vow.

oblation. 'If Jesus wished to be conveyed to the temple by his parents and there to be offered by them as an offering to God, who will dare to find fault with the oblation of children by their parents, or prevent them from making a living offering to God?'<sup>115</sup>

Hrabanus did not deny that oblation subjected children to *servitium*, but countered that the liberating service to God was incomparable to earthly servitude. Significantly, he experienced the attack on child oblation as a direct onslaught on monasticism as such, a reaction which reveals how important child oblates had become as a source of monastic recruitment. His message was clear: child oblation was indispensable to monasticism. It therefore was an institution founded by divine authority, and could not be judged by the standards of temporal law. Such must have been the main thrust of his appeal of 829.

Was it successful? Alas, the council which was to resolve the case left no record. Apparently, a compromise was agreed upon; that much is clear from subsequent events. Gottschalk was free to depart from Fulda, but had to leave his property behind; and although he was no longer bound to stability in Fulda, he had to remain a monk all the same. He started a wandering life which earned him the scornful epithet *monachus gyrovagus*, one of the worst terms of abuse for a Benedictine monk.<sup>116</sup> He first went to Corbie and Hautvillers, and later to Orbais where he was ordained priest by an auxiliary bishop. In 845-846 he travelled to Italy and the Balkans, finding a friendly protector in Count Eberhard of Friuli who held him in high esteem.<sup>117</sup> Hrabanus remained deeply resentful and got his chance to hit back when Gottschalk's ideas

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 428: 'Si enim Jesus a parentibus ad templum deferri voluit, ibique offerri pro se hostiam Deo, quis est qui parentum oblationem in filiis suis reprehendere praesumat, et prohibere quod non exhibeant eos hostiam viventem Deo?'

<sup>116</sup> *RB*, c. 1, 10-11: 'Quartum vero genus est monachorum quod nominatur girovagum, qui tota vita sua per diversas provincias ternis aut quaternis diebus per diversorum cellas hospitantur, semper vagi et numquam stabiles, et propriis voluntatibus et guilae inlecebris servientes, et per omnia deteriores sarabaites'. Hrabanus first used this word in 848 in a letter to Hincmar on behalf of the synod of Mainz, instructing about Gottschalk: 'Notum sit dilectioni vestrae, quod quidam gyrovagus monachus nomine Gothescalc, qui se assertit sacerdotem in vestra parrochia ordinatum, de Italia venit ad nos Moguntiam novas superstitiones et noxiam doctrinam de praedestinatione dei introducens et populos in errorem mittens'. Cf. *MGH Conc.* III, p. 184; *Migne PL* 125, cols. 84-5.

<sup>117</sup> Ganz, 'The debate on predestination', pp. 287-8. See also Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, no. 42, pp. 481-7.

on predestination started to attract widespread attention. Having immersed himself in the works of Augustine, Gottschalk now defended the idea of a 'double predestination' (*gemina predestinatio*), preaching that mankind was not only predestined to good but also to evil. Hrabanus' reaction shows that Gottschalk's subtleties completely eluded him; he had no eye for the central place of God's grace in his adversary's theology. Divine grace was omnipotent, and man should place no trust in his own free will: such was Gottschalk's (and Augustine's) basic tenet. Hrabanus, however, only saw danger in a man who after having undermined monasticism now directed his arrows against the moral order of the church and the Empire as a whole. And for all practical purposes, attacking monasticism and preaching double predestination amounted to the same thing, for if people believed that they were not only predestined to good but also to evil, what incentive would they have left for penance and gifts – or for relying on monks to read psalters and masses in aid of their salvation? Carolingian monasteries were like powerhouses of prayer, mediating between mankind and the supernatural, and if prayer stopped, monasticism no longer had any spiritual *raison d'être* – or any economic basis, for that matter. As Hrabanus wrote to Count Eberhard of Friuli in c. 846-847:

For the rest it has become widely known in these parts that a certain know-all named Gottschalk resides with you, who teaches that God's predestination constrains every man in such a manner that even if someone wishes to be saved, and strives towards this goal through an upright faith and good works, in order to attain the eternal life through God's grace, he will labour fruitlessly and in vain if he has not been predestined to life – as if God, who is the author of our salvation, not of our perdition, forces man into death through His predestination. And already this sect has brought many to despair, to the extent that they say: 'Why would it be necessary for me to labour for my salvation and my eternal life? For if I will do good, and am not predestined to life, it will be of no benefit to me whatsoever; if I will act immorally, this will not hurt me in any way, for God's predestination will procure me an eternal life'. This teaching has created scandal among many in these parts, and it has made people disobedient to the preachers of the Gospel, for it has reduced them to despair about themselves.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, no. 42, p. 481: 'De cetero quoque, quia divulgatum est in istis partibus constat quendam sciolum nomine Gotescalcum, apud vos manere, qui dogmatizet, quod predestinatio Dei omnem hominem ita constringat, ut etiam, si quis

Their first confrontation was at a council in Mainz in 848, in the presence of King Louis the German. For Gottschalk, who had come of his own volition and convinced of being in the right, the meeting turned out to be disastrous. He was handed over to his proper superior, Hincmar of Rheims, for Orbais was part of this archdiocese.<sup>119</sup> A synod in Soissons (849) headed by Hincmar utterly condemned him; to add insult to injury, he was 'publicly flogged, and compelled to burn the books containing his teachings'.<sup>120</sup> He spent the rest of his life in captivity in the monastery of Hautvillers, dying shortly before 870.<sup>121</sup> All along, Hrabanus avidly watched from the sidelines, spurring on his younger

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velit salvus fieri, et pro hoc fide recta atque bonis operibus certet, ut ad vitam aeternam per Dei gratiam veniat, frustra et incassum laboret, si non est predestinatus ad vitam, quasi Dei predestinatione sua cogat hominem interire, qui auctor est salutis nostrae, non perditionis. Et iam hinc multos in deperationem suimet haec secta perduxit, ita ut dicant: Quid mihi necesse est pro salute mea et vita aeterna laborare? quia si bonum fecero, et predestinatus ad vitam non sum, nihil mihi prodest; si autem malum egero, nihil mihi obest, qui predestinatio Dei me facit ad vitam aeternam pervenire. Haec traditio multis in istis partibus scandalum est, et predicatoribus evangelii homines inobedientes facit, quia iam desperantes de semetipsos eos reddidit'. Cf. Ganz, 'The debate on predestination', pp. 287-8.

<sup>119</sup> Given the fact that he left Fulda in 829, it is puzzling that he Gottschalk went precisely to Mainz and his former abbot to defend his views. Or did he still perceive himself as a monk of Fulda? Strange as this may seem, it would explain the entry of a *Godescalc prb* in Fulda's Annals of the Dead in 869 (Freise, 'Zur Datierung und Einordnung fuldischer Namensgruppen', p. 539); this year fits very well with Gottschalk's presumed time of death, which must have occurred not long before 870, and Gottschalk was, after all, a priest. His former brothers may have entered him into the Annals of the Dead, long after all controversy had ebbed away. (Differently: Schmid (ed.), *Die Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda*, II/1, 'Kommentiertes Parallelregister', p. 246.) In 848, however 'he was compelled to return to the metropolitan *civitas* of his diocese', as Hincmar wrote in *Annales Bertiniani* (s.a. 849), pp. 72-4. Obviously, the meeting decided that he should be punished as a monk of Orbais, and not as one of Fulda. Or was he handed over to Hincmar because he claimed that he had been ordained a priest in the latter's diocese? Hrabanus' letter to Hincmar of 848 (see above, n. 101) seems to indicate as much. The sources relevant to the trials of 848 and 849 have been gathered by Wilfried Hartmann in MGH Conc. III, pp. 179-184.

<sup>120</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 849, pp. 72-4.

<sup>121</sup> As Traube has concluded from Hincmar's writings, in 870 Gottschalk was no longer alive; in a necrology of Hautvillers, Mabillon (*Annales XXXVI*, p. 42) found a *Godescalcus monachus* who died on the 30th of October; cf. Traube (ed.), *Godescalci Carmina*, p. 720. n. 1. As Hincmar commented wryly: '... sicque indignam vitam digna morte finivit et abiit in locum suum'; *De una et non trina deitate*, Appendix, col. 618.

colleague Hincmar whenever he seemed to waver in his strictness towards the captive monk. He chastised Hincmar for speaking to Gottschalk – and even worse, for allowing him to write, ‘for in his writing he has proved to be even more dangerous than in his talk’.<sup>122</sup> Between 849 and 863, Fulda’s *Annals of the Dead* explicitly listed seven deceased monks as *oblati*; the new confrontation with Gottschalk may well have been at the root of this changed pattern of registration.<sup>123</sup> Until the very end, Hrabanus remained bitter and unforgiving towards the man who had once been his brightest and most promising pupil.

Their clash was not only over moral and theological issues, it was also a confrontation between very different personalities and intellectual styles. Hrabanus was the *magister orthodoxus* of his time, to whom any sort of ‘novelty’ was tantamount to blasphemy. He grounded his exegesis as well as his legal writing in what he called the *lex divina*, by which above all he meant the Old Testament.<sup>124</sup> To him, Gottschalk’s theology was that of a *sciolus*, a ‘know-all’ who sacrificed truth on the altar of intellectual pride. When word reached him from Italy that some *scioli* were berating him for never saying anything of his own accord, he was deeply mortified; the source of these malicious comments may well have been Gottschalk himself, who was in Italy from 846 onwards, attracting support and admiration.<sup>125</sup>

The root of their fierce controversy lay in the past. Hrabanus was genuinely hurt by Gottschalk’s wish to leave Fulda, as his persistent rancour shows. After all, he was a devoted teacher, and Gottschalk must have been his brightest boy. After his tonsure Hrabanus had sent him for

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<sup>122</sup> Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, no. 44 (a. 850), pp. 496-7: ‘Miror enim prudentiam vestram, quod istum noxium virum, hoc est Gotescaleum ... scribere aliquid permisistis, in qua officio magis nocere potuit quam viva voce loquendo’. See also *ibid.*, no. 43 (a. 850), p. 489, where Hrabanus is adamant about Hincmar not granting Gottschalk a reconciliation and access to communion, in spite of the latter’s serious illness.

<sup>123</sup> Schmid (ed.), *Die Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda*, II/1, ‘Kommentiertes Parallelregister’, p. 246; the first of these seven *oblati* was listed as ‘Engilbraht prb obl’.

<sup>124</sup> De Jong, ‘Old law and new-found power’.

<sup>125</sup> Hrabanus repeatedly called Gottschalk a *sciolus* (‘know-all’ or ‘sophist’), a term of abuse also used in a letter he sent to Emperor Lothar between 842 and 846 (Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, no. 39, p. 477) referring to those who had accused him of only excerpting the work of others. Was he thinking of Gottschalk who was in Italy at the time, and may have influenced court circles against Hrabanus?



further training to Reichenau, where Wetti (d. 824) became his teacher and Walahfrid Strabo his life-long friend.<sup>126</sup> Well-educated and primed for the priesthood Gottschalk now decided to fight for his freedom. It is not difficult to guess Hrabanus' feelings, and they shine through in the passionate appeal he directed to Emperor Louis in 829:

One is astounded by, indeed one pities, those who, ignoring what they professed in infancy, prefer what they forswore at the outset of life, as if it were of more eminent and greater dignity. There are those who learned holy letters from the cradle, and were raised on the fare of the Holy Church until they were sufficiently well-educated to be promoted to the sublimity of holy orders. But ungrateful for such a gift, they oppose the faith of the orthodox fathers, and daily attack the mother of all the faithful with the weapons of their iniquity.<sup>127</sup>

Here speaks a rejected abbot who had invested much time and energy in one of 'his' boys, only to see him turn his back on all that had been offered, at the very moment when the investment was about to yield its return. It is doubtful whether Gottschalk really wanted to return to 'the world' in the sense of exchanging the monastic state for that of a layman. Gottschalk's childhood in Fulda as well as his subsequent training had prepared him for a life as a priest and a scholar, which was indeed how he lived once he regained his liberty. He may have wished to live as a secular cleric or a canon, which would have allowed him liberty of movement and control of his inheritance, but surely not as a

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Lambot (ed.), *Oeuvres théologiques et grammaticales de Godescalc d'Orbais*, p. 170; Fehrenbach, 'Walahfrid'. Gottschalk's famous poem *Ut quid iubes* has generally been taken as a product of his stay in Reichenau; manuscript tradition, however, points to the poem having originated in the West-Frankish kingdom, after Gottschalk left Fulda. Cf. Weber, *Die Gedichte des Gottschalk von Orbais*, 241-6.

<sup>127</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 419: 'Unde mirandi, imo miserandi sunt illi qui, hoc negligentes quod in infantia professi sunt, et quod in primordio vitae suae abdicaverunt, quasi eminentioris ac majoris dignitatis sit, ei proponunt. Sunt ergo quidam qui a cunabilis suis sacras litteras didicerunt, et sanctae Ecclesiae nutrimento tamdiu aliti sunt, quousque satis educati in sublime sacrorum ordinum proveherentur. Sed ingrati tanto munere, contraria orthodoxorum Patrum fidei sentiunt, ac matrem universorum fidelium telis iniquitatis suae quotidie impugnant ...'.

The expression 'in sublime sacrorum ordinem proveherentur' could be interpreted as a reference to Gottschalk's being ready to rise to the priesthood via the usual stages of first becoming a sub-deacon or deacon; however, if his year of birth was approximately 810 or slightly earlier, he may very well have been on the eve of attaining the priesthood itself when he decided to leave Fulda.

layman; after all, he had spent a lifetime studying Scripture, learning letters ‘from the cradle’, as Hrabanus had it. This expression is as conventional as it is accurate, for Gottschalk can’t have been much more than five years old when he came to Fulda. After his stormy departure he did his utmost to be elevated to the priesthood, even going as far as obtaining his much-desired ordination from an auxiliary bishop. His wandering years he spent either preaching or studying and writing. This was not the life of a man who wished to return to ‘the world’; instead, he wanted to break the fetters of monastic stability by which he was bound to Fulda and Hrabanus. Nonetheless, he remained a monk, and in 849 he was defeated by the weapons of monastic stability: he was to be tried as a monk of Orbais and therefore delivered into the hands of the archbishop of Rheims, who punished him as a rebellious monk, sentencing him to permanent custody and silence. This was precisely the kind of punishment that Hildemar had in mind for child oblates who persistently resisted discipline: rather than banishing them from the community – an ultimate measure which might be suitable for those who had converted in adulthood – oblates should be corrected by imprisonment, for they had known no other life than that within the cloister and should therefore not be exposed to the outside world.<sup>128</sup>

### C. *Lambert of Schienen*

Gottschalk’s bid for freedom was a test-case which had initially seemed successful, but in the end the principle of the irrevocability of child oblation prevailed. The plight of Lambert of Schienen is much less well known. It only emerges through an otherwise undated letter of Pope Nicholas I (858-867).<sup>129</sup> During the latter’s papacy, Lambert travelled to Rome with his father Atho to bring his case before Nicholas, who reported:

This cleric named Lambertus travelled with his father – once a count, now a cleric, however – to the Holy See and to our presence, stating that his father, while still a layman, had built two monasteries on his own estates, with the intention that after his death, this son of his, Lambert, should succeed him. The father then of his own accord and without any regard for the Rule, entirely without the son’s consent, put the cowl on him while he was still at a tender age, somewhere between eight and

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<sup>128</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, cc. 2, 38 and 71, pp. 109, 363 and 627.

<sup>129</sup> Nicholas I, *Epistolae*, no. 132, pp. 652-4.

eleven. Therefore, after a certain period of time, Bishop Salomo along with some others had him clothed in the monastic habit – unwillingly, Lambert claims – although he had not been formally offered by his father, nor received the blessing of an abbot. And on this occasion he was deprived of his paternal and maternal inheritance by his brothers, and completely against his will, as has been said already, as if he had wished to remain a regular monk.<sup>130</sup>

This affair was very different from that of Gottschalk. Here, the backdrop was not that of a large royal abbey, but that of a small community founded by an Alemannian aristocrat. An ingenious piece of research by Karl Schmid has revealed that Lambert came from the community of Schienen, which was founded by the powerful count Atho who later on in life became a cleric.<sup>131</sup> As such, he ruled the monastic community of Schienen – by all accounts a rather irregular state of affairs.<sup>132</sup> The father came along to Rome to argue his side of the case. He confirmed that his son spoke the truth, but pleaded that he had wished to regularise the situation: his son should be a real monk and follow in his footsteps. Testifying under oath, however, he admitted that Lambert had always resisted becoming a monk, and that force had been used. He also confirmed that Lambert had never promised obedience, ‘neither did I, his father, offer him wrapped in the altar cloth at the altar,

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 653-2: ‘Praesens clericus nomine Lambertus una cum patre suo nomine Atho, quondam videlicet comite, nunc autem clerico, ad limina apostolorum properans adiit praesentiam nostram asserens, qualiter idem pater eius in laicali adhuc ordine in praediis propriis aedificasset monasteria duo, voluntatem gerens, ut post suum decessum praesens filius eius Lambertus in locum ei succederet, quem infra teneram aetatem inter octavum et undecimum annum constitutum memoratus pater proprio arbitrio absque regulari institutione extra omnem illius voluntatem cucullam induit. Igitur post quoddam illius temporis spatium, ut ipse dicit, Salomon episcopus cum quibusdam aliis eidem Lamberto absque patris oblatione vel abbatis percepta benedictione monasticum illum induere fecit habitum, ut fertur, invitum. Et sub hac occasione paterna seu materna hereditate a fratribus suis privatum esse atque contra omnem, ut dictum est, voluntatem suam regularem illum quasi permanere voluit monachum’.

<sup>131</sup> Schmid, ‘Kloster Schienen’.

<sup>132</sup> When Schienen was registered in the confraternity book of Pfäfers at that period, it was indeed without an abbot, which shows that Atho was not recognized as such; *ibid.*, pp. 296-8.

nor was he ever made a regular monk by receiving the blessing from any priest or abbot, as custom requires'.<sup>133</sup>

What was going on here, one wonders? At first sight, this repentant father seems to have done everything within his power to help his son procure a release from the monastic state. But on further consideration he turns out to have been as ignorant as he was over-zealous, for he complained that, had he known how hard monastic life was, he would never have forced his son to wear the cowl. At the time, Count Atho seems to have had no idea of the possible consequences of his self-styled act of oblation, notably that his son stood to lose his property. Having woken up to the implications of his act, he now used his improved knowledge of the Rule to extricate his son from the predicament he had landed him in. While pleading with the pope, he neatly defined the ingredients of a regular child oblation. This should be performed according to Benedict's Rule, that is at the altar, and it should be followed by a blessing by a priest or an abbot. Presumably he referred to the blessing of the cowl, which would become a familiar phenomenon in later monastic *consuetudines* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>134</sup> These show that two rituals – the offering at the altar and the blessing of the cowl – made the child into a monk. This custom must already have originated two centuries earlier, for judging by Atho's list of irregularities the blessing was essential to the efficacy of the ritual.

What would the pope have said if this had been a regular oblation, answering to the two essential requirements? Would Lambert then have been bound to monastic life? The testimony of father and son focused on the irregularities surrounding Lambert's oblation, but Pope Nicholas concentrated on what he must have considered the main issue: Lambert should never have been made a monk by the use of force. Nicholas' verdict was clear: no abbot or bishop or monastic community was entitled to force anyone into entering monastic life. 'What someone does not choose he neither desires nor loves; what he does not love, he easily despises'.<sup>135</sup> Monastic life should be undertaken of one's own volition;

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<sup>133</sup> Nicholas I, *Epistolae*, no. 132, p. 653: '... asserens, quia numquam regulam aliquando promisit, neque ego pater eius palla altaris indutum illum obtuli neque a quocumque sacerdote vel abbate, ut mos deposcit, benedictione percepta regulae umquam subactam monachum fuisse'.

<sup>134</sup> Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*, pp. 46-76.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas I, *Epistolae*, no. 132, p. 653: 'Quod enim quis non eligit nec optat, profecto non diligit; quod autem non diligit, facile contempnit'.

until Lambert himself decided that he wanted to be a monk, he should be allowed to 'live a canonical life among the religious and churchmen, apart from worldly and secular pursuits and concerns'. And the pope added: 'We do not, indeed, regard religious canons as separate from the fellowship of holy monks, because according to the Apostle, 'every man shall receive his own award according to his own labour' (Cor 3, 8)'.<sup>136</sup>

This sounds like a direct rejection of the tenets of the Aachen reform councils, which did everything to create a clear separation between the monastic and the canonical life. For Atho and Lambert this distinction was crucial, however, for becoming a canon Lambert would have the right to own property, which would enable him to reclaim his lost inheritance. But from whom? Who were the *fratres* who had robbed Lambert of his *hereditas*? Surely Lambert was not made an oblate by his father to benefit his siblings, for this would make Count Atho's behaviour totally inexplicable: why would he first get rid of an unwanted son, only to help him regain his inheritance later on?<sup>137</sup> The 'brothers' referred to were in fact the monks of Schienen, as is shown by the pope's verdict that 'no abbot or bishop or *monachorum reliquorum conventus*' had the right to forcibly make Lambert a monk.<sup>138</sup> Schienen and another monastery had been private foundations, built on Atho's own lands and led by the count himself who had later become a cleric. Atho had intended his son Lambert to be his successor, but had not realised that his improvised oblation would disqualify his son as the owner of these monasteries. Had he been aware of the strictures of the Rule, he later claimed, he would never have made his son a monk. The danger that threatened Atho and Lambert was that their private monasteries, unless specifically exempted, would become regular ones, subject to episcopal authority. This also explains the somewhat dubious role of Bishop Salomo I of Konstanz (839-871): he must have been eager to

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 653-4: '... liceat illum a mundanis et laicalibus remotum vagationibus vel negotiis inter religiosos et ecclesiasticos viros in canonica degere vita. Non enim putamus, quod absit, religiosos canonicos a sanctorum monachorum vita et consortio seiunctos, quia 'unusquisque' secundum apostolum 'propriam mercedem accipiet secundum suum laborem'.

<sup>137</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 445-5 translates *fratres* as 'siblings', no doubt because it fits his argument that parents used child oblation to rid themselves of superfluous offspring.

<sup>138</sup> Schmid, 'Kloster Schienen', pp. 299-302.

wrest Schienen from Atho and Lambert, and possibly connived with the community to turn their future abbot into a regular monk. Atho and Lambert fought to prevent Schienen changing from an aristocratic *Eigenkloster* to a regular community in which the abbot would no longer control his ancestral foundation. For this very reason, there is no question of Lambert wishing to become a layman; rather, he wanted to rule Schienen as a *clericus canonicus*, having the best of both worlds: control of his property and a status befitting an abbot.

This was what Pope Nicholas granted him. Judging by the evidence of monastic commemoration, Atho did attain his goal: making Lambert into an abbot without having to relinquish his hold over Schienen. In 835/840 the *fratres* of Schienen were entered into the Reichenau *Liber confraternitatum*; over the years new names were added, thus allowing a glimpse of Schienen's development in the course of the ninth century. In 860/870 when five new names were added to the list of monks, there was a *Lantbret* among them, distinguished from the others by having his name entered near the top of the already existing list, right behind that of the then reigning abbot Adalram.<sup>139</sup> Obviously, this *Lantbret* was not an ordinary monk; as Schmid has argued, he must have been identical with the son Count Atho had destined to head the community.<sup>140</sup> Notwithstanding his special position, Lambert had not yet risen to the abbacy, as is clear from another list from the 860s; in the *Liber Vitae* of Pfäfers the Schienen community figures without an abbot.<sup>141</sup> A third list, sent over between 880 and 890 to Remiremont, however, shows Schienen to be under the leadership of *Lantbertus abba*.<sup>142</sup> For all practical purposes, Schienen was still an *Eigenkloster*, for the names of eight of Lambert's lay relatives were effortlessly integrated into the list of his monks.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Authenrieth et al. (eds), *Das Verbrüderungsbuch der Abtei Reichenau*, Facsimile, p. 86.

<sup>140</sup> Schmid, 'Kloster Schienen', pp. 293-5.

<sup>141</sup> *Liber Viventium Fabariensis*, vol. I, p. 121.

<sup>142</sup> *Liber memorialis Romaricensis*, II, p. 21r.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Schmid, 'Kloster Schienen', p. 293, and pp. 283-91 for the identification of Atho/Hatto/Ato; this powerful count was active in Alemannia as well as the middle Rhine area, serving Louis the Pious, Lothar and Louis the German. The *Liber memorialis Romaricensis*, fol. 21r. lists the following names: Ato, Ato, Adallind, Adellind, Peringer, Kerhart, Scroht, Rato. The second Ato ('of Buchau') and Adellind are a couple, followed by the five names, all of which except for that of Scroht can

Obviously, Atho's strategy had worked. Father and son had skilfully put their case to the pope, stressing the irregularity of the oblation as well as the use of force by Bishop Salomo. It is impossible to make out whether Salomo indeed compelled Lambert to become a monk; if so, father and son must by then have had an inkling that things were going very wrong indeed. Given the fact none of the lists of the monks of Schienen includes Lambert's name, it seems likely that Atho and his son undertook action not long afterwards. Whatever the case, they made the most of the involuntary nature of the whole business, knowing that this argument would appeal most to Pope Nicholas.

Although Lambert's case was to become grist to the mill of twelfth-century advocates of liberalised child oblation,<sup>144</sup> Pope Nicholas's sensible verdict had no impact on contemporary legislation north of the Alps. And how 'liberal' was the papal position? Pope Eugenius in 826 forbade involuntary entry into monastic life, unless it served as punishment for a crime;<sup>145</sup> this verdict nonetheless implies a complete acceptance of forced entry into monastic life, and of the presence of monastic prisoners within religious communities.<sup>146</sup> In the Frankish realm some also felt that children should agree with their oblation, as Gottschalk's case shows, but this point of view did not prevail. Frankish councils were chaired by kings who were not averse to involuntary tonsure when it suited their dynastic designs,<sup>147</sup> and attended by abbots less than happy at seeing the inheritance of oblates slip from their grasp. Pope Nicholas' letter concerning Lambert had been directed at the bishops in the realm of Louis the German, but in 868 – only one year after Pope Nicholas' death – these same bishops took a decision diametrically opposed to his instructions. At Worms, under the watchful

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be identified as their children. Presumably the first Ato is Lambert's father. The next abbot after Lambert may have been Kerhelm, another member of the family. Because of its position as a 'family business', Schienen's numbers dwindled towards the end of the ninth century. Under Archbishop Hatto of Mainz, also abbot of Reichenau (888-913) – and another member of the family – the monastery was absorbed by Reichenau. Cf. Schmid, 'Kloster Schienen', pp. 302-4.

<sup>144</sup> Berend, 'La subversion invisible', pp. 128-9.

<sup>145</sup> Council of Rome (a. 826) c. 32, MGH Conc. II, 2, p. 580: 'Sicut enim qui monasteria elegerunt a monasteriis egredi non permittuntur, ita hi, qui inviti sine iusta ostensionis crimine monasterio sunt intromissi, nisi volentes non teneantur, quia quod non petunt non observant'.

<sup>146</sup> See below, chapter VII, § 4.

<sup>147</sup> Laske, *Das Problem der Mönchung*, pp. 69-73.

eye of Louis the German, they reaffirmed the decision of the fourth council of Toledo in which the parental vow had been recognised as the equivalent of a personal conversion; they also referred to Pope Gregory's letter to Boniface forbidding oblates to contract marriage. Their conclusion was unambiguous: anyone who had once received the tonsure or the habit was not permitted to retract at a later date, and could even be retained by force.<sup>148</sup>

A council meeting at Tribur (near Mainz) in 895 came to a similar conclusion with regard to young clerics. Those who had been raised within the church and who had already publicly participated in the liturgy by singing or reading should be forced to return by the bishop if they dared to leave; if their hair had grown they should be tonsured again, and on no account were they to take a wife or be elevated to the priesthood.<sup>149</sup> If such steps were taken against errant young *clerici*, wayward child oblates must have faced even sterner measures. The advocates of a free choice for oblates had been silenced effectively; instead, the bishops meeting in Tribur concentrated on the rights of

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<sup>148</sup> Council of Worms (a. 868), cc. 22-23, Mansi XV, col. 873; Hartmann, *Das Konzil von Worms 868*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>149</sup> Council of Tribur (a. 895), c. 27, Mansi XVIII, col. 145: '... ut clericus ecclesiastice nutritus, in ecclesia coram populo vel legens, vel cantans, si postmodo relicto clericatus habitu, a castris dominicis, quibus adscriptus est, profugus & apostata elabitur, & ad saeculum egreditur: ab episcopo canonice coerceatur, ut ad finem matris ecclesiae revertatur. Quod si in hanc indiscipline perdurat, ut comam nutriat, constringatur, ut iterum detondeatur, & postea nec uxorem accipiat, nec sacrum ordinem attingat'. This text is reminiscent of the Tenth Council of Toledo (a. 656), c. 6, p. 313, which also views a public appearance ('coram ecclesia') in monastic or clerical habit as the point of no return for children raised within the church. Note, however, that whereas the Spanish bishops spoke of boys and girls donated by their parents, the council of Tribur only treated boys who were raised as *clerici*. This decree seems to have confounded some historians. Boswell (*The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 249) translates its concluding sentences as follows: 'if [the oblate] leaves, he is to be returned; if he has let his hair grow, he is to be tonsured again; if he has taken a wife, he is forced to dismiss her', with a misleading reference to c. 16, which is in fact about the burial of the dead. There is no reason to assume that the decree was about 'monastic' oblates; furthermore, run-away young clerics persisting in their errors were not forced to dismiss their wives, but barred for life from either marriage or the priesthood. See also Doran, 'Oblation or obligation', p. 131: 'Canon 24 of this council stated that a monk given away by his parents, who had begun to read and sing in church, was bound to stay'. C. 24 says nothing of the sort, and neither does c. 27, to which Doran presumably refers.



parents and monastic communities. For example, parents could still reclaim a girl who had been veiled of her own accord below the age of twelve, but they could only do so within one year and a day; if the girl was over twelve when she decided to take the veil, however, her relatives could no longer get her out of the convent.<sup>150</sup> This represented not so much an effort to protect the wishes of children as an attempt to avoid potential conflicts between parents and convents over claims upon young girls. The decree reinforced the 'stability' of young nuns, while respecting parental rights concerning girls below the age of twelve; it also stipulated that girls entering convents unbeknownst to their parents should do so of their own accord. In other words, the bishops worried about girls acting without parental consent, about religious communities inducing them to take the veil against their will, and about young nuns leaving the convent again after having been veiled. They were not concerned with daughters who had been donated by their parents. To the contrary, those meeting at Tribur seem to have assumed implicitly that a proper parental oblation would be valid, for they did not bother to mention it.

A pattern emerges from Carolingian legislation issued after 817, as well as from the cases of Gottschalk and Lambert. The initial parental oblation had to be followed by a personal profession of the oblate, at which occasion the child was also tonsured and clothed – or veiled, in the case of girls. Boys may have received the cowl (*cuculla*) earlier, as

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<sup>150</sup> Council of Tribur (a. 895), c. 24b, MGH Capit. II, p. 227: 'Puella si ante duodecim annos aetatis sponte sua sacrum sibi velamen assumit, possunt statim parentes vel tutores eius id factum irritum facere, si volunt. At si annum et diem id dissimulando consenserint, ulterius nec illi nec ipsa mutare hoc poterunt. Porro si in fortiori etate adolescentula vel adolescens servire Deo elegerint, non est potestas parentibus hoc prohibendi'. The version of this decree given in Mansi XVIII, cols. 144-5 reads as follows: 'Quaecumque virgo sub patrocinio ante annos 12. non coacta, sed propria voluntate, sacrum velamen sibi imposuerit, annumque & diem, nullo repente, velata permanserit; ab eodem sancto habitu ulterius non recedat, sed sponsa vero regi Christo, immaculato agno, ulterius incorrupta & immaculata deserviat. Si vero idem patronus post annum & diem, sanctam propositum corrumpere, & velatam studuerit repetere, atque Christo suam sponsam rapere: secundum praestituta canonum praedudicamus, ut vires non obineant, sed Christo regi suam sponsam relinquat'. Inexplicably, Doran concluded from these texts that the council of Tribur allowed 'monks' who had been against their oblation to leave when they were twelve years old; cf. Doran, 'Oblation or obligation', p. 131, n. 26, with a reference to c. 23, which is in fact about those contracting illicit sexual unions with women vowed to God.

Lambert did, to show that they were monks from their oblation onwards. Even so, a second ritual at the onset of the *aetas intelligibilis* remained necessary. Thus, lip service was paid to the ideal of voluntary entry into monastic life while upholding the irrevocability of child oblation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REGISTRATION AND COMMEMORATION

The Rule of Benedict demands that parents have a charter drawn up when they hand over their child, as adults did when they converted to monastic life. In both cases this *petitio* should contain the threefold vow of stability, *conversatio morum* and obedience. Not surprisingly, such documents have left few traces, for they mainly served as proof after the fact: the charter was to be kept in the monastery, to be used as evidence if a monk was to infringe upon his vows.<sup>1</sup> Once the oblate or the novice had died, there was no reason whatsoever to preserve their *petitio*. It is therefore difficult to trace individual child oblates through such charters; the donation which usually accompanied the act of oblation does not solve the problem either, for only rarely do donation charters reveal that the gift was actually connected to the oblation of a child. This correlation remains hidden behind familiar phrases such as '*pro remedio animae meae*'. Only when the gift was stipulated to be exclusively for the sustenance of the oblate, the connection between *oblatio* and *donatio* emerges. But such cases were rare, for they went against the Rule's precept that parents should refrain from providing their child with any personal income.

The evidence is slightly better when monasteries registered newcomers in a systematic fashion, in a book which remained an enduring part of the community's identity and was therefore carefully preserved. Only then may we distinguish child oblates from adult novices, and make some tentative estimates of their numbers.

There is a consensus with regard to changing recruitment patterns in the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> In growing numbers, adult novices (*conversi*) found their way to religious institutions which until then had been filled with child oblates. These changes caused tension between 'old style'

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<sup>1</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 29: 'Illam tamen petitionem eius, quam desuper altare abbas tulit, non recipiat, sed in monasterio reservetur'.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, 'Monastic recruitment in the eleventh and twelfth centuries'; idem, *Simoniack Entry*, pp. 38-40; Teske, 'Laien, Laienmönche und Laienbrüder', pp. 286-90; Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, pp. 11-6.

monks and the new type of recruits: members of each group felt themselves to be superior to the other.<sup>3</sup> It is much harder, however, to determine when the earlier changeover from adult to child recruitment occurred. After all, a conscious break with a sinful world was at the heart of early monasticism; such a *conversio* presupposes experience in the outside world and a personal wish to create an alternative society. Benedict's Rule still breathes this spirit, in that it gives pride of place to the adult novice. But things changed somewhere between the sixth and the ninth centuries. The biographies of individuals indicate as much. Boniface, Alcuin, Hrabanus and Hincmar all grew up within the cloister, and these are just the most famous of the leading lights of Carolingian ecclesiastical and political life. Nearly all of those who reached a position of prominence had entered a monastery in childhood. As a *conversus* of twenty-four years old, Benedict of Aniane was less usual.<sup>4</sup> The availability of monastic schools was not the only reason for this changing recruitment pattern. Hildemar of Civate unhesitatingly preferred child oblates to adult recruits, for he felt that the former were malleable and therefore better material for monastic life, while the latter were inclined to stick to the ways of the world. His solicitude towards the education of children within the community reveals that he considered all energy devoted to them a worthwhile investment, whereas adult converts remained second-class monks.<sup>5</sup> With good reason, Hrabanus Maurus treated any criticism of child oblation as an onslaught on monasticism itself: once this source of recruits dried up, monasteries might well disappear.<sup>6</sup>

Such indications are important and revealing, but they are all qualitative statements which leave much doubt as to the actual number of child oblates. Moreover, not all those who entered monasteries and nunneries in childhood did so as a result of child oblation. Abbeys also harboured young secular clerics who were brought up and educated within monastic schools. Some of them left the community for service

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<sup>3</sup> *Liber Anselmi de humanis moribus*, c. 78, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Severus, 'Benedikt von Aniane', p. 535.

<sup>5</sup> De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery'; and see below, chapter IV, § 3.

<sup>6</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, cols. 434-5: 'Sed quia sunt quidam qui monachicam vitam detestantes, constitutionibus sanctae Regulae contradicunt, despicientesque eam, murmurando invicem susurrant, quod superflua sit sanctio regularis, et non necessaria ...'.

elsewhere, but others made their profession and became monks. Hence, a close inspection of systematic registration of new recruits to the monastery – however fragmentary the evidence – is the only way in which prevailing recruitment patterns might be established with any measure of certainty. Needless to say, extant sources do not permit any kind of statistical analysis, but careful examination of the material does yield some useful insights. It confirms the overall impression one gains from narrative sources: the majority of newcomers to monastic life in the Carolingian age indeed consisted of children, a large number of whom were in fact child oblates.

### 1. THE *PETITIO* OF 817

Smaragdus' commentary on the Rule contains a widely used model for the *petitio* of a child oblate. His was not the only one of its kind,<sup>7</sup> but it was by far the most influential. The same text appears in the famous Carolingian Codex 914 of St Gall,<sup>8</sup> and it was used in St Remi of Rheims in the second half of the ninth century to record scores of oblates in a special register;<sup>9</sup> two centuries later the same *petitio* was still being employed, as is shown by three eleventh-century manuscripts from Bamberg, Weissenburg and Cicagna (near Genoa).<sup>10</sup> It was also included in a wide range of Cluniac *consuetudines* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Evidently this was an important text. As set down by Smaragdus, it translates as follows:

Since it has been regarded from time immemorial as holy and fitting that parents should place their children in God's Temple in order there to serve Him in bliss, it cannot be doubted that this is given to us as a holy

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<sup>7</sup> Vat. lat. 5958 contains a *petitio* from Monte Cassino, entitled 'Hoc modo debent saeculares viri offerre Deo filios suos', ed. Albers, *Consuetudines monasticae*, vol. 3, p. 180; Hildemar also required a *petitio* containing the threefold vow, but did not give a model.

<sup>8</sup> St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek cod. 914, p. 192. Cf. Scherrer, *Verzeichnis*, pp. 333-5; Traube, *Textgeschichte*, pp. 49-50; Paringer, 'Le manuscrit de St-Gall 914', pp. 101-7.

<sup>9</sup> Paris BN lat. 13090, fols. 72r-77v.

<sup>10</sup> Bamberg, Staatliche Bibliothek can. 7, fol. 70r; cf. Leitschuh, *Katalog*, vol. I, pp. 863-5; Cod. We Guelph. 4129, olim Weissenburgensis 45, cf. Butzmann, *Die Weissenburger Handschriften*, pp. 168-174; Cod. Casinensis 179, fol. 32r; cf. Inguanes, *Codicum Casinensium manuscriptorum catalogus*, vol. I, pp. 262-3.

example so that we too should do the same with our children. For it is a just and right judgement that we should bear fruit for our Creator. And therefore I give this son of ours, named X, with the offertory gift in his hand and with the *petitio* enveloped in the altar cloth, to the saints whose relics are preserved here and to the incumbent abbot, in the presence of witnesses, in order that he may persevere in a life according to the Rule in such a way that from this day onward he is no longer permitted to shake off the yoke of the Rule; rather may he know that he must faithfully follow the prescriptions of the Rule and joyously enter combat for God with the others. And in order to keep this gift of ours unsullied, I promise under oath and in the presence of God and His angels that I will never – neither personally, nor through an intermediary, nor by making use of my wealth in any way – provide him with any opportunity to leave the monastery. And in order that this *petitio* retain its force, I have confirmed it with my own hand and have handed it over to witnesses for confirmation.<sup>11</sup>

Where was this document formulated? Did it spring from the mind of Smaragdus, or must its origin be sought elsewhere? The eleventh-century *Chronicon* of the Italian monastery of Novalesse mentions the oblation of a certain Amblulfus in 771-772, inserting his *petitio* which is identical to the one used by Smaragdus.<sup>12</sup> Did the author adapt the text to the norms of his own time, or were such documents already drawn up in Novalesse in the 770s? I have long hesitated between both options, but both turn out to be untenable. Recently, Uwe Ludwig has solved the

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<sup>11</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 302: 'Dum legaliter sancitum antiquitusque teneatur et cautum cum oblationibus domino parentes suos tradere filios in templo domini domino feliciter servituros, procul dubio hoc de nostris filiis faciendum nobis salubriter praebetur exemplum. Aequum etenim est iudicium creatori nostro de nobis reddere fructum. Idcirco hunc filium nostrum nomine illo cum oblatione in manu atque petitione altaris palla omnia involuta ad nomen sanctorum quorum hic reliquiae continentur et abbatis praesentis, trado coram testibus regulariter permansurum, ita ut ab hac die iam non liceat illi collum desub regulae excutere iugo, sed magis eiusdem regulae fideliter se cognoscat instituta servare et domino cum ceteris gratanti animo militare. Et ut haec nostra traditio inconvulsa permaneat, promitto cum iureiurando coram deo et angelis eius, quia numquam per me numquam per suffectam personam nec quolibet modo per rerum mearum facultates aliquando egrediendi ei de monasterio tribuo occasiones. Et ut hac petitio firma permaneat, manu mea eam firmavi et testibus tradidi roborandam'.

<sup>12</sup> *Chronicon Novalicense*, III, c. 24, pp. 191-2. Cf. Cipolla, *Monumenta Novalicensia*, vol. I, p. 47, who thinks it likely that the author inserted an authentic charter dating from 771-772.

riddle of Amblulfus by making it perfectly clear that this oblate was identical with an Abbot Amblulfus recorded in 880.<sup>13</sup> His oblation must therefore have taken place in the late 820s or in the 830s, that is, well after the Aachen councils.

Undoubtedly the origin and diffusion of the *petitio* for oblates are connected to the Aachen reform movement; this is clear from extant manuscripts which usually link it to the so-called *Collectio capitularis*, otherwise known as the *Regula Benedicti abbatis Anianensis*. This is in fact a compilation of the conciliar decisions of 816 and 817; its many manuscripts reveal that the Aachen legislation became most widely known under this heading.<sup>14</sup> Several manuscripts show the oblation charter and a *petitio* for adult novices – also mentioned by Smaragdus – being attached as an appendix to the Aachen legislation. The coherence is clearest in the Codex 914 of St Gall: the same scribe wrote in both *petitiones* and the conciliar legislation, apparently perceived as belonging together.<sup>15</sup> The fact that Smaragdus used these texts in itself indicates some connection to the Aachen reform councils, for his endeavour was closely bound up with that of Benedict of Aniane.

This link between this particular *petitio* and the Aachen legislation has consequences for the interpretation of the decree issued in 817 on child oblation. Given the unambiguous way in which the *petitio* affirmed the irrevocability of the parental oblation, it seems most unlikely that the same council should have produced a completely contradictory decree. The stipulation that the child confirm the parental oblation after having reached the age of understanding should therefore be understood as a matter of obligation rather than of choice. Evidently the council of 817 saw no conflict between a personal confirmation by the oblate himself and an oblation charter whereby ‘from this day forward he is no longer permitted to shake off the yoke of the Rule’.

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<sup>13</sup> Ludwig, ‘Die Gedenklisten des Klosters Novalesse’, pp. 48-54.

<sup>14</sup> Semmler, ‘Zur Überlieferung der monastischen Gesetzgebung’, pp. 341-61.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Scherrer, *Verzeichnis*, p. 334. The *petitio* for novices has been edited from this manuscript by Albers, *Consuetudines*, vol. .III, pp. 176-7; the same text, but based on Bamberg, Staatliche Bibliothek can. 7, fol. 70r, ed. Zeumer, *Formulae extravagantes*, II, no. 31, MGH *Formulae*, p. 570. Note, however, that this *petitio* for novices differs from the one prescribed by Smaragdus; only the oblation charters are similar in all manuscripts. The connection between the Aachen councils and the *petitio* for novices has been established by Semmler, ‘Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils’, p. 47.

## 2. THE PROFESSION BOOK OF ST GALL

Since the days of Abbot Otmar (d. 759) St Gall habitually registered every newly professed monk into a special codex. This book has been preserved almost in its entirety, encompassing the period between the eighth and the tenth century.<sup>16</sup> After their profession, new monks of St Gall personally wrote out their vow in the profession book – that is, if they were able to do so. If not, a cross in front of the vow would suffice. Before 841 when the royal archchaplain Grimald became abbot of St Gall, newcomer monks only promised stability and obedience; during his abbacy, however, this dual formula was replaced by a threefold vow which included the *conversio morum*.<sup>17</sup> As this addition already indicates, this change was the result of the Aachen reforms; and indeed, in the above-mentioned Codex 914 we find the new threefold vow copied directly after the *petitiones* of child oblates and adult novices issued by the reform councils.<sup>18</sup> Clearly there were shorter and longer versions of the *petitio*; if need be, it could be reduced to the bare minimum of the vow itself. The oblation charter of Rather of Verona for Lobbes seems to have consisted of the vow only,<sup>19</sup> and Hildemar envisaged something similar when commenting on the Rule: ‘Where it says, let them make the *petitio* of which we have spoken earlier, this should be understood as [the document] in which one speaks of one’s stability and conversion of life and obedience etcetera’.<sup>20</sup> St Gall also used a short formula; presumably after the newly professed monk had entered his vow or his *signum*, not the single charter but the whole profession book was deposited on the altar.

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<sup>16</sup> Krieg (ed.), *Das Professbuch der Abtei Sankt Gallen*. A new analysis of the material is forthcoming: A. Zettler, *Die Mönche von St. Gall im früheren Mittelalter. Mit einer Rekonstruktion des Professbuchs*, to appear in *Subsidia Sangallensia* 2.

<sup>17</sup> Krieg (ed.), *Das Professbuch der Abtei Sankt Gallen*, pp. 16-9; Herwegen, ‘Geschichte der benediktinischen Profeßformel’, pp. 57-60.

<sup>18</sup> St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek cod. 914, p. 193: ‘Ego ille promitto stabilitatem meam et conversionem morum et oboedientiam secundam regulam Benedicti coram Deo et sanctis eius’. Edited by Albers, *Consuetudines*, vol. III, p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis*, c. 11, p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 50, p. 548: ‘Quod enim dicit: faciant petitionem, quam supra diximus, ita intelligitur, in qua dicitur de stabilitate sua et conversione morum suorum et oboedientia et reliqua’.



This book reveals nothing about the background of the new members of the community, or about the way in which they entered St Gall. That a number of them were in fact child oblates is suggested by the cases of a certain Erchanger, who can be traced by means of St Gall's collection of charters. In 837 a father named Rumolt donated estates to the monastery, stipulating that its revenues were destined for his son Erchanger, in order to allow him to lead a life suitable to a monk.<sup>21</sup> Only after Erchanger's death was St Gall to gain full possession of the property. In passing, the charter refers to Rumolt having offered his son to God 'with the eucharistic gifts, according to the precept of the Rule'. Erchanger's name also crops up in the profession book, in a section which evidently dates from before Grimald's abbacy, for he only promised stability and obedience; most likely he made his profession under Abbot Bernwic (836-841).<sup>22</sup> Hence, four years at most passed between Erchanger's oblation and his subsequent profession; he must have been still quite young when his father handed him over.

Undoubtedly more child oblates are hidden behind the list of names in St Gall's profession book, but there is no way to identify them. Although the monastery was familiar with the charter for oblates endorsed by the Aachen council, there is no sign that they were in fact using this model. Rumolt's charter does not speak of a *petitio* either – only of Erchanger being duly offered with *oblaciones*. This omission in itself is hardly conclusive, for the reference to Erchanger's oblation was only made in passing. One thing is clear, however: in ninth century St Gall child oblates made a formal profession once they reached the appropriate age, and were then duly registered in the profession book.

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<sup>21</sup> *Urkundenbuch der Abtei Sankt Gallen*, vol. I, no. 363, p. 338: 'Ego in Dei nomine Rumolt trado ad monasterium sancti Galli, ubi Bernwicus abba preesse videtur, pro remedio animae meae aeternaeque recompensatione quicquid in hac presenti die proprietatis in villa Tegarasca nuncupata vel in eadem marca visus sum habere ... sub ea ratione, ut Erchanger filius meus, quem etiam cum oblationibus juxta regularem institutionem Deo obtuli, congruum inter vos locum habeat monachicam vitam ducendi predictaeque res pleniter deinceps ad vos redeant perpetualiter possidendum'.

<sup>22</sup> Krieg (ed.), *Das Professbuch der Abtei Sankt Gallen*, p. XIV, no. 12. The series of names from Erchanger to Wito (nos. 12-23) has been written by the same hand; probably all these monks made their profession on the same day. The same Erchanger can be found in Reichenau's *Liber confraternitatum*, in a list of monks of St Gall; cf. Authenrieth et al. (eds.), *Das Verbrüderungsbuch der Abtei Reichenau*, Facs., p. 11, D 5.

This embraced all members of the community, past and present, and thus represented St Gall's corporate identity. The use of such a codex also enabled the monastery to dispense with producing lengthy charters for each newly professed monk, thus saving costly parchment as well.

### 3. THE REGISTER OF RHEIMS

Still, there were communities that deemed it necessary for each newcomer to have his *petitio* written out in full, time and again: such was the common practice in St Remi of Rheims in the second half of the ninth century. In this abbey, governed by the archbishop of Rheims, the charters of all newcomers to the community were entered into a special register. This codex did not contain copies made after the event, but the original *petitiones*, which followed the familiar Aachen model.<sup>23</sup> Palaeographical evidence indicates that the *petitio* was written out prior to the ritual of oblation or profession: in many cases the text of the charters is written in by a scribe different from the one who entered the names of witnesses. These, therefore, must have been added at a later stage, presumably after the ritual had been completed.<sup>24</sup> In other words, prior to the actual oblation ritual the scribe entered the charter into the register, while not yet being sure who would show up as witnesses. Only after they had 'heard and seen' the child being handed over to St Remi, their names and *signa* were also recorded. Each time again the whole text of the *petitio* was written out in full, which shows that the community attached great value to every phrase it contained. According to the Rule the *petitio* played a symbolic role in the rituals of entry to monastic life: it was the tangible evidence of the vow which had just

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<sup>23</sup> Paris, BN ms. lat. 13090, fols. 72-77b. The first to give an edition was Delisle, 'Registre des professions'. He reconstructed the original sequence of the remaining eight pages, which were randomly bound into the present codex. Fol. 72 and 73 belonged to a quire now lost; the six other ones belonged to another quire, of which the middle section has disappeared. The correct order is: fol. 72, 73, 77a, 74 (then a gap of two pages), 75, 76 and 77b. See about this also Leclercq, 'Oblat', who reproduces Delisle's edition. Two charters on fol. 77r have become almost entirely unreadable. In subsequent references I will follow Leclercq's numbering.

<sup>24</sup> This is clearly visible in no. 1, fol. 72r; no. 11, fol. 73v; no. 23, fol. 74v; no. 27, fol. 75r; no. 28, fol. 75v; no. 35, fol. 77b/r. Other lists of witnesses have been added by the same scribe who wrote the charter, but also at a later date: nos. 5-6, fol. 72v; no. 10, fol. 73v; no. 30, fol. 76.

been made orally. In this case the whole register was placed upon the altar, a gesture which not only sanctified the vows being made at that particular moment, but also reaffirmed those that had been uttered in the past.

Of this register only a fragment has been preserved: eight of its leaves were bound into a codex to which they did not originally belong. This fragment contains the charters of 37 child oblates and one adult novice. Only twelve of those are dated, starting in 868 and ending in 907; the *petitio* of the one novice, Rotfridus, was entered when Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims (845-882) was St Remi's abbot.<sup>25</sup> He may have played some part in starting this kind of registration, but the fragmentary nature of the register makes it impossible to determine a *terminus a quo*. Certainly the register was conceived after 817, for it follows the familiar model of the Aachen council. Between June 868 and November 873 seven child oblates found their way to St Remi, which yields an average of a little over one oblate a year.<sup>26</sup> If one tentatively projects this ratio onto the eleven undated oblation charters preceding the one of the novice Rotfridus, it seems likely that the first charters of this fragment originated in the 850s.

The presence of the one novice amidst 37 oblates is significant. First, it shows that unlike St Gall the abbey of St Remi did not require a profession from the oblates at a later stage of their life. The act of oblation was final, and of equal validity to the profession of an adult. Had this not been the case, the register would have contained the professions of former oblates as well; instead, the *petitiones* of all newcomers were entered in the register. No doubt the usual designation of 'oblation register' reflects an implicit decision by scholars to treat the extant fragment's one profession charter as of marginal significance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> No. 11, fol. 73v. There are several palimpsests: one on fol. 76r (no. 32) of the *puer Evrardus* who in 971 was donated by Johannes, *consenciente m[at]re eius Goidela*, and another on fol. 73r, listing the names of 23 of St Remi's dependents, thus erasing the names of the witnesses belonging to the (older) oblation charter of Flodoinus, donated by Erlegius (no. 9).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. nos. 15-19, fols. 77a/v-77v. To these five *petitiones*, two unreadable ones on fol. 77r should be added.

<sup>27</sup> Leclercq, 'Oblat', col. 1823; Devisse, *Hincmar*, vol. II, p. 855; Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1030; recently also Schmid, 'Über die Eigenart der mittelalterlichen Gedenkübelieferung von Korvey', p. 186, who speaks of a 'Faszikel mit Oblationsurkunden'.

On an alternative reading, however, that single profession becomes crucially significant, as actually supplying the key to the register's function: it was a codex containing oblations *and* professions. The novice Rotfridus's lone presence thus has the further, important implication child oblates represented the overwhelming majority of new recruits to St Remi. Had there been more adults entering the abbey, their *petitiones* would have been recorded in the register as well. The fragmentary register therefore is a rare and valuable witness to patterns of monastic recruitment in the second half of the ninth century.

It also sheds light on the diversity of ninth-century child oblation. Whereas legislators insisted upon the parents being the only ones entitled to offer a child, the register of St Remi provides many exceptions to this rule. In 25 charters it was the father who performed the act of oblation; only in three did the mother assume this role.<sup>28</sup> In these cases the father must have been absent or deceased, for he was not listed among the witnesses. The inverse situation – the father donating the child and the mother witnessing the oblation – occurred several times.<sup>29</sup> But other people than parents also entrusted children to St Remi: one example was the woman Rainlindis who described the oblate Stephanus as 'my *consobrinus* through consanguinity, but in fact and by virtue of affection my adoptive son'.<sup>30</sup> A cousin as well as a nephew may have been meant in the case of two men who both offered their *nepos*. Only once did a brother perform the act of oblation.<sup>31</sup> Presumably these various relatives had assumed guardianship over the children and could therefore legally perform oblation. There is, however, the interesting charter of a certain Rotmarus who offered his *nepos* Rodoardus on behalf of the oblate's father Arbodus.<sup>32</sup> It was not a matter of the father being unable to attend the ritual, for it was he who ordered the *petitio* to be drawn up, serving as its first witness. Was uncle Rodoardus perhaps the godfather or overlord of the child and hence asked to do the honours? We can only suspect it.

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<sup>28</sup> Mothers acted as donors in BN ms. lat. 13090, no. 4, fol. 72r; no. 5, fol. 72v; no. 30, fol. 75r.

<sup>29</sup> Nos. 21-22, fol. 74r; no. 35, fol. 75r.

<sup>30</sup> No. 10, fol. 73v: 'Idcirco ego Rainlindis hunc consanguinitate quidem carnali consobrinum meum, affectu vero et effectu filium adoptivum nomine Stephanum (...) trado ...'.

<sup>31</sup> No. 31, fol. 75v.

<sup>32</sup> No. 24, fol. 74v.

Many relatives of course served as witnesses. Not only can the mother be occasionally identified, but also brothers, and in once case a grandfather.<sup>33</sup> Doubtless other kinsmen were involved, but they remain hidden behind the subscriptions. The number of signatories often was surprisingly high: the presence of some ten witnesses was nothing out of the ordinary, and in one case even thirteen of them were participating in an oblation ritual.<sup>34</sup> Clerics also acted as such, but they can only be identified if they were ordained priests or held some other ecclesiastical rank, as was the case with 'Liulfus vel Lambertus monachus et sacerdos'.<sup>35</sup> If a witness was a mere monk from St Remi his status was not indicated in the charters, as can be gathered from one Heirbrannus who acted as a witness in or shortly before 868. Almost certainly he was identical with the Heirbrannus who earlier had been offered to St Remi by his uncle Dodo.<sup>36</sup> The offering of Hilduinus by his father Count Achadaeus was obviously such an illustrious occasion that the scribe saw fit to depart from his set model, venturing the information that seven monks in orders attended the ceremony; moreover, Hilduinus had been handed over to the *praepositus* Rotfridus himself, acting on behalf of the abbot.<sup>37</sup> The arrival of this highborn oblate evidently caused a stir, for the notables of the community were present in full force.

Recently attention has been drawn to yet another form of registration at St Remi: a list with brief notices of the oblation of ten children, all of whose names also can be found in the register just discussed.<sup>38</sup> Today this list has disappeared, but the seventeenth-century scholar Guillaume Marlot still knew it and quoted from it – that is, unless he was simply paraphrasing the register itself. Given his general accuracy and proclivity to quote from sources at length, it seems that he indeed used an entirely different document. The form of the notices indicates as much: unlike the oblation charters they were drawn up after the event, and therefore set in the perfect tense. If one overlooks this feature, the notices might

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<sup>33</sup> Brothers as witnesses: no. 7, fol. 72v; no. 15, fol. 77a,r; no. 35, fol. 77b,r. A grandfather as witness: no. 16, fol. 77a,v.

<sup>34</sup> No. 1, fol. 72r.

<sup>35</sup> See no. 11, fol. 73v. Cf. also no. 27, fol. 75r; no. 22, fol. 74r.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. no. 8, fol. 73r and no. 14, fol. 77ar.

<sup>37</sup> No. 27, fol. 75r.

<sup>38</sup> Stratmann, *Hinkmar von Reims*, 72-8, who, building upon my earlier comments on the Rheims register in *Kind en klooster*, pp. 90-4, added valuable insights and information; at the time of writing (1985) I was unaware of the existence of the list.

indeed read like abstracts of the full charters from the register, for all oblates figuring in the list can be found in the register. In one case, however, the notice ventures that the oblation occurred in the presence of Abbot Hervaeus (900-922), information which was omitted in the corresponding charter.<sup>39</sup> This excludes the possibility that the list was a mere abstract from the register; rather, it was drawn up during Hervaeus's abbatiade when the scribe was able to add extra information from experience.

So what was the purpose of this separate list? Its chronology corresponds in no way with that of the register itself. At its head we find Count Achadaeus' son Hilduinus, who became an oblate in 881. He is followed by two oblates who were handed over under Abbot/Archbishop Hervaeus, that is between 902 and 922. The subsequent entries refer to three oblation charters dating from before or in 868, for they are written on the same leaf and by the same hand as the third, which was entered into the register on April 24th 868. The list omits this clearly dated charter, but includes the two other ones, stating that the first of them was donated *praesente abbate*, and more specifically, the second one – Gozmundus – was handed over *abbate praesente Heriveo*. It is difficult to see how this is possible, unless one assumes that Hervaeus indeed was present, but long before he became the abbot of Rheims in 902. The three following notices are difficult to date, but given the part of the register the names are derived from, they probably also stem from the 880s, as do the two last entries, both dating from 884.<sup>40</sup> It has been

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<sup>39</sup> Stratmann, *Hinkmar von Reims*, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Stratmann, *Hinkmar von Reims*, pp. 77-8 gives an edition which I follow here; the corresponding numbers of the charters in the Rheims register as given by Leclercq, 'Oblat' have been added, along with their location in BN ms. lat. 13090. No. 1 (=no.25, fol. 75r): Anno Domini 881, calend. novembris, feria 3, in missa sanctorum omnium, Hilduinus a patre Achadeo, praesente Rotfrido praeposito in vice abbatis, coram testibus monachis Teutboldo presbytero, Aldrado, Odescalco, Sigloardo subdiacono, oblatus est. Signum Achadei comitis.  
No. 2 (=no. 37, fol. 77bv): Otbertus monachus factus in archimonasterio S. Remigii per oblationem et traditionem quam fecit de eo Gerbertus, anno Dom. 902, pridie calend. novemb., / feria 1, indict. 5, et signavit petitionem et traditionem cum testibus.  
No. 3 (=no. 38, fol. 77bv): Albricus ad nomen beati Remigii et aliorum sanctorum, quorum reliquiae in eius sunt ecclesia, filium suum obtulit et tradidit Deo et domino Heriveo abbati, in eadem ecclesia seu monasterio mancipandum et permansurum sub testibus, videlicet D. Heriveo archiepiscopo, cui oblatus est, Evrardo fratre eius,

suggested that the strange order of the oblates listed was the result of the register already being in disorder by the time the list was compiled,<sup>41</sup> but codicological evidence speaks against this. Why then would the two oblates Gerondus and Gozmundus on fol. 77a/r have been singled out for inclusion, while the following charter (still on the same leaf) of Rifuinus, conveniently dated too, was left out? A selection definitely was made. Was it Marlot who quoted the notices at random, thereby distorting their original order? This can neither be proved nor disproved. Nonetheless, if one assumes that he displayed his usual accuracy and left their order intact, the question remains what design lay behind that order.

The list is headed by a the son of a count who by any standard was prominent in the region of Rheims. Achadaeus was castigated by Archbishop Hincmar himself for the way his men had been ravaging the countryside;<sup>42</sup> for this count's private use, however, the monks of St Remi produced a beautifully executed Psalter.<sup>43</sup> In short, the man displayed all the characteristics of a proper Carolingian *potens*, including military might as well as an involvement in literate culture; like many *potentes* he had an amiguous relation with his local church. No other oblate of St Remi seems to have been as illustrious as his son Hilduinus; hence, the fact that he heads the list makes sense. A comparable list of

Guntardo, Sigeberto, an. 907, idibus ianuarii, feria 5.

No. 4 (=no. 13, fol. 77a/r): Manierus filium suum nomine Gerondum dedit praedicti monasterio S. Remigii sub signatura sua et testium, videlicet Berulfi, Wandelberti et praesente abbate.

No. 5 (=no. 14, fol. 77a/r): Flotharius filium suum nomine Gozmundum, cum oblatione in manu atque petitione, altaris palla manu sua involuta, ad nomen sancti Remigii et sanctorum ibi quiescentium, abbate Heriveo praesente, tradidit Deo coram testibus permansurum in monasterio S. Remigii. Signum Flotharii, qui hanc carthulam fieri iussit. Heribranni, Fulberti, Alarici.

No. 6 (=no. 6, fol. 72v): Wichardus a patre Wicardo oblatus est.

No. 7 (=no. 4, fol. 72r/v): Mauringus a matre sua Donna traditus est beato Remigio.

No. 8 (=no. 8, fol. 73r): Herbrannus ab avunculo suo Dodone.

No. 9 (=no. 10, fol. 73v): Stephanus a consobrina sua Relinde secundum carnem consanguinitate, affectu et effectu oblatus est an. 884.

No. 10 (=no. 29, fol. 75v): Rocherus fere duodenus oblatus est et traditus a patre Gerardo.

<sup>41</sup> Stratmann, *Hinkmar von Reims*, p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Flodoard, *Historia ecclesiae Remensis*, III, c. 26, p. 546; Stratmann, *Hinkmar von Reims*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>43</sup> Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 272, c. 882-900; cf McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 260 and 269.

oblates of San Salvatore/Santa Giulia in Brescia is organised likewise: at its head is the Emperor Lothar's daughter. The fact that Hilduinus was followed by two oblates handed over under Abbot Hervaeus – and two who were mistakenly associated with him – indicates an attempt to connect present-day and past oblates to their illustrious companion. But what was the reason for including several oblates from a more distant time – the 860s even – while others dating from as recent as 901 were left out? A definite principle of classification must have been applied, but it remains elusive. Whatever the purposes of the list, it was not one of simple registration of oblates past and present. Did it have some commemorative function, associating new oblates coming in under Hervaeus with their prominent predecessor and also with those who had recently died? Until more is known of the individuals involved, this riddle cannot be solved.

The register of Rheims and its elusive counterpart, the list of oblates, are very interesting in revealing that the oblates of St Remi immediately became full members of the community. Their entry into monastic life coincided with the oblation ritual, for no further profession was required. The register also testifies of a high degree of literacy in St Remi, as well as to a firm belief in the power of writing within a ritual context. After all quite an amount of expensive parchment was spent on entering these entirely identical charters into the register, time and again. Evidently the book had more than a purely administrative function: it united all newcomers to the community in one codex, thus contributing to the group identity of St Remi. Moreover, it guaranteed the preservation of their *petitiones*, for the codex was much less vulnerable to loss or damage than loose charters were. For this reason, a fragment of the register now remains while most individual oblation charters have perished. This was not only important to the community itself, but also to those who fulfilled their obligation to 'return the fruit' by donating their children *ad nomen sancti Remigii*. It was not only the names of new members of St Remi that were preserved for posterity, but also those of their donors and witnesses. Moreover, whenever the register was deposited upon the altar at the occasion of another oblation or profession, all those contained within its covers – donors, child oblates, witnesses and the occasional adult novice – were repeatedly brought into contact with the sacred. A continuous commemoration was thus created, guaranteeing the regular proximity of the patron saint, St Remi.



4. THE *NOTICIA* OF SAN SALVATORE/SANTA GIULIA

A different kind of registration was produced in the royal nunnery of San Salvatore/Santa Giulia in Brescia, not unlike St Remi's list of oblates headed by the count's son, Hilduinus. San Salvatore's *liber memorialis* contains a list (*noticia*) of all girls who were offered during the regime of Abbess Amalberga.<sup>44</sup> She had been in charge of San Salvatore since 837; the list was composed in 848, the year in which Emperor Lothar made his daughter Gisla an oblate. The entry of this royal daughter was the direct occasion for the list being drawn up, as its heading shows: 'The lord Emperor Lothar donated his daughter, lady Gisla'.<sup>45</sup> This entry is followed by that of 40 other girls; the names of the donors have been consistently included. In other words, the list works backwards from the year of Gisla's oblation, enumerating all girls that had preceded her since Amalberga became abbess in 837. In one respect, the structure of this list is not unlike the one of Rheims headed by Hilduinus: both highlighted the arrival of a prominent oblate. In St Remi, however, this luminary's oblation lay in the past, while in San Salvatore the list was drawn up to celebrate the entry of a royal to the community. Gisla's oblation somehow elevated all parents and children who had preceded her to a higher plane; together with this ruler's daughter and her royal father they were entered in the memorial book, to be commemorated in the prayers of the entire community.

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<sup>44</sup> In the memorial codex of Brescia, Ms. G. VI.7 of the Bibliotheca Queriniana in Brescia, fols. 42r-43v; edition by Becher, 'Das königliche Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Santa Giulia', pp. 303-5. This now replaces the older edition by A. Valentini, *Codice necrologico-liturgico del monasterio di S. Salvatore o. S. Giulia in Brescia*, Brescia 1887, which will in due course be entirely superseded by *Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex von San Salvatore/Santa Giulia in Brescia*, to appear as MHG Libri Memoriales et Necrologia, N.S. 4. The list of oblates has the following heading: 'NOTICIA REGULARIS ORDINIS QUOMODO TRADITE SUNT S(AN)CTAEMONIALES IN MONASTERIO D(OM)NI SALVATORIS SECUNDUM ORDINEM S(AN)C(T)AE REGULE IN TEMPORE DOMNAE AMELPERGI HUMILIS ABBATISSAE'. Cf. Becher, 'Das königliche Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Santa Giulia', p. 303.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 303-4: 'IN TEMPORE DOMNAE AMELPERGI HUMILIS ABBATISSAE DOMNUS IMPERATOR LOTHARIUS TRADIDIT FILIAM SUAM DOMNAM GISLAM SECUNDUM ORDINEM S(AN)C(T)AE REGULAE'.

The total number of child oblates was surprisingly high – forty-one girls in only eleven years – although admittedly one Radaldus pushed numbers up by offering no fewer than seven daughters to San Salvatore. They must have been donated over a number of years, but in the list of oblates they were grouped together.<sup>46</sup> This shows that the names of the donors rather than those of the oblates constituted the organising principle of the list. Twenty-seven girls were offered by their father, seven by their brother; in the seven remaining cases the girls were called *nepta*, so uncles must have been the ones performing the oblation. No mothers whatsoever are apparent in this context; evidently in Brescia it was out of the question that women should offer their children, even when they were widows.

Not all the names of those entering San Salvatore have found their way into this list, for the *noticia* included only child oblates; the names of adult novices were left out. Comparison with two other, partially surviving lists of names in the same *liber memorialis* reveals that the number of adult novices must have been very small. The first (fol. 5r) comprises the entire community of San Salvatore as it was in 850, while the second (fol. 6r) dates from 854, enumerating 49 dead sisters. In both cases the first part of the list is lacking: the list of 850 therefore only consists of 34 names. Of these 34 nuns who were alive around 850, a mere fourteen do not appear in the *noticia* headed by Gisla; some of these fourteen may have been oblates after all, assuming that most of the girls donated in the decade before Amalberga became abbess were still alive in 850 when the community found its way into the *liber memorialis*. Such names were of course not entered in the *noticia*, for this only contained those offered between 837 when Abbess Amalberga assumed

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<sup>46</sup> Fol. 5r of the same Brescia codex contains the second part of a list of all nuns that lived in San Salvatore around 850, comprising 34 names. Presumably, the order of this list was determined by the date of entrance. Radaldus' daughters Lantruda, Ratperga, Gisetruda and Otila were grouped together as numbers 7-10, which indicates that they were either donated together or in rapid succession. Regimperga and Imeltrudam however, appear later as numbers 25 and 26. The seventh daughter, Rachinilda, was not listed among those living in the community. Probably she had already died before the 850 list was drawn up, for her name was included in a list of deceased nuns compiled in 854 (fol. 6r).

office and 848, when Gisla joined the community.<sup>47</sup> The oblates of the earlier 830s must have been included in the list of 850, and the same holds true for those child oblates who came to San Salvatore after 848. This means that only a small number of the fourteen unidentifiable names from the list of 850 can have belonged to those who entered the community as adults. Of the oblates mentioned in the *noticia*, six had died by 854, for their names appear in the list of dead nuns. Among them was one of Radaldus' seven daughters, Rachinilda.<sup>48</sup>

The *noticia* of San Salvatore served a purpose which was somewhat different from that of the register of St Remi in Rheims. The latter primarily played a role in the oblation ritual and furnished legal proof afterwards; the commemoration of the donors was a side-effect which gained importance in the course of time. The *noticia*, however, belonged to the context of prayer and commemoration from its very origin. When a royal oblate arrived in 848, Abbess Amalberga celebrated this extraordinary honour by entering all 'her' child oblates into the *Liber memorialis*, thus fixing the event in San Salvatore's collective memory. Moreover, those donating children were also expressly commemorated in the community's prayers, for the names of the donors determined the order of the *noticia*. Thus, it represented not only a series of nuns headed by an distinguished fellow-oblate, but also a list of donors honourably associated with a royal father who had acted likewise.

Whatever their differences, however, the register of Rheims and the *noticia* of San Salvatore yield a similar pattern of recruitment: the newcomers in both communities predominantly consisted of child oblates.

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<sup>47</sup> There is the additional complication of seven names of the list of 850 having been written over older ones that were erased; these may have been names which corresponded with the *noticia*, but which are now lost. The fact the names written over them occur in none of the lists shows that these were indeed later additions. Cf. Becher, 'Das königliche Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Santa Giulia', p. 305.

<sup>48</sup> Becher, 'Das königliche Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Santa Giulia', pp. 306-7: Giselperga, Imeltruda, Cristina, Gariberga and Rotruda. Two different Rotruda's appear in the *noticia* (nos. 15 and 42); either one of them may have died before 854. Of those six names, two also show up in a fragmentary list of living nuns of San Salvatore, sent over shortly before 830 to Reichenau: Rotruda and Cristina (*ibid.*, p. 300, nos. 21-22). Should this list be dated differently, or did Amalberga after all include some oblates donated before her time? Most likely, other nuns than the oblates from the *noticia* were meant, for Rotruda and Cristina were very common names.

## 5. OBLATES AND NOVICES IN CORVEY

Some historians have tended to treat child oblates as 'prospective' monks or nuns, on a par with adults who were going through the novitiate, going on the assumption that only the personal profession made them full members of the community.<sup>49</sup> The material just discussed shows that this assumption is on the whole incorrect; certainly it should not be generalised. Indeed St Gall knew something like a personal profession for all newcomers, adults and child oblates alike. Here, the emphasis lay on the profession, and possibly oblates were viewed as prospective monks while they awaited this crucial moment. On the other hand, in St Remi the oblation itself was sufficient to make a boy fully a monk, and in San Salvatore the child oblates who arrived between 837 and 848 appear as full members in the list of 850, which indicates that they were very much part of the community from the moment of their oblation onwards.

Evidence from Corvey yields a similar picture. Its two key sources, the *Liber vitae* and the *Liber traditionum*, are difficult to interpret, for both are based on older material which was compiled and revised at a later date. From this Saxon monastery's foundation in 822 onwards until 1146 the names of new members of the community found their way into a list. Shortly after the middle of the twelfth century, this result of over three centuries of list-keeping was copied into Corvey's new 'Book of Life'.<sup>50</sup> The compilers of this *Liber vitae* stuck to the original structure

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Schmid, 'Mönchslisten', p. 593 and 631 who speaks of 'Klosterangehörige' or 'Mönchsanwärter', or (idem, 'Zum "Liber Vitae"', p. 32) 'Mönchskandidaten'.

<sup>50</sup> This list (A) has been edited in by F. Philippi in 'Der *Liber Vitae* des Klosters Corvey', along with another list of deceased and living brothers of Corvey (B) which was written in 962 and sent to St-Bertin for purposes of commemoration, and a third one (C) which he considered to be a list of brothers dating from the tenth century. Philippi's edition of A and B has been reproduced by Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, who gives a better edition of C, however, based on a manuscript which was only identified in 1974 (Studienfonds-Archiv Paderborn, Hs. III, no. 27, fols. 106-106v). As it turns out, C is in fact a list of brothers who were alive under Abbot Folcmar (916-942), which subsequently – until Druthmar's abbacy in 1015-1046 – served as a list of new entries. Cf. the *status quaestionis* in Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, pp. 7-20, and above all, the contributions to Schmid and Wollasch (eds.), *Der Liber Vitae der Abtei Corvey*, vol. 2. For a survey of the complexity of

of their older material, recording the names in chronological order, according to the monks' dates of entry; some further order was brought into the list by indicating the various abbots' terms of office. That many in fact came to Corvey as child oblates can be ascertained from another important source, the *Liber traditionum*, in which gifts to the monastery were recorded. This also is a retrospective document, for it assumed its definitive shape only after 1037; the eleventh-century compiler used two different sets of *traditiones*, one dating from 822-876 and the other from c. 965-1025.<sup>51</sup> Both sets employed a different system of registration. The notices in the older series of *traditiones* are more extensive and mention witnesses, but their chronological order is no longer intact; moreover, the series may contain many lacunae. This part of the *Liber traditionum* therefore allows only incidental comparison with the *Liber vitae* and its list of names. In this respect, the younger series of *traditiones* is much more useful. It is more succinct, and leaves out all mention of witnesses; nonetheless, it registered all gifts made to Corvey at the occasion of entries into monastic life, systematically including the names of the new monks as well as those of the donors. For the period from c. 965 until 1025, therefore, the *Liber traditionum* can be compared to the lists of new members of the community, and gifts can be connected to their entry into monastic life.<sup>52</sup>

In most cases gifts were made *for* the new monks, either by their father or their brother. The usual formula is very brief, and clearly retrospective: 'Tradidit X pro filio/fratre suo A in vico B'. An over-

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the Corvey sources, see Schmid, 'Über die Eigenart der mittelalterlichen Gedenküberlieferung von Corvey', and the literature cited on p. 178, n. 1 and p. 186, n. 65; Honselmann's edition of list B has now been superseded by Sandmann, 'Die Liste der Corveyer Klosterangehörigen'. About the origins of the *Liber vitae*: Jakobi, 'Zur Entstehung des Liber Vitae', esp. p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, pp. 75-82. Johanek, 'Die Corveyer Traditionen', p. 131-2 argues convincingly, however, that a proper editor was at work, meaning that the compiler of the *Liber traditionum* did not follow the original text. In a similar vein: Hlawitschka, 'Zur Herkunft der Liudolfinger'.

<sup>52</sup> The best edition of the *Liber traditionum* – along with an excellent introduction – is provided by Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, pp. 59-166. This edition now supersedes the one by Eckhardt, *Studia Corbeiensia*. Honselmann also conveniently correlates the names from the *Liber traditionum* with those from the lists of monks. See, however, Mechtild Sandmann's criticism of his edition of the list from St Bertin (962): Sandmann, 'Die Liste der Corveyer Klosterangehörigen', p. 39, n. 4.

whelming majority of the newcomers must indeed have been child oblates. Between c. 965 and 1025<sup>53</sup> Corvey gained 85 new monks, of which only 17 do not show up in the *Liber traditionum*, probably because no gift worth recording was made on these occasions. Two adult novices, Gelo and Alfricus,<sup>54</sup> acted as donor *pro se*, obviously being entitled to dispose of their own wealth. The same holds true for someone who was still a youngster, but evidently already of legal capacity: the *adolescens Heinricus* donated one *familia* to Corvey when he entered the monastery.<sup>55</sup> The remaining 65 recruits must have been child oblates, for whom a donation was made by their father or brother. Of some of them, we know with certainty that they were very young indeed when they became monks, for the Annals of Corvey mention three *infantes* who died in 978; all three of them figure in the *Liber traditionum* as well as in the list of monks.<sup>56</sup> These children were registered in the monks' list when they were handed over to Corvey, doubtless being considered as full members of the community from the moment of their oblation onwards. Together with those of the three novices who made their own profession, their names were entered into a list with the significant heading: 'Nomina fratrum novae Corbeiae'. Among the *traditiones* of c. 965-1025, however, at least eleven were made for sons or brothers whose names do not occur in the monks' lists.<sup>57</sup> These may simply have been donations *pro remedio animae*, as one father seems to have made for the benefit of his daughter.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, it is entirely possible that these sons indeed entered Corvey only to leave later on, either because they had been intended to stay only temporarily or because they could not bear monastic life. In the latter case, they may have been struck from the monks' list. There is no way of making sure of what actually happened. But it is clear that between c. 965 and 1025,

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<sup>53</sup> The registration of gifts stopped in 1025 during the abbacy of the Druthmar (1015-1046), who was a reforming abbot installed in Corvey by the emperor; cf. Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5, nos. 461 and 468.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161, no. 512: 'Adolescens Heinricus tradidit I familiam in Bursine'.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-41, nos. 360, 364 and 372.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133, nos. 304-5, 308, p. 135, nos. 323 and 329, p. 148, no. 432, p. 151, no. 448, p. 152, nos. 452-3, p. 165, nos. 543 and 544. P. 159, no. 494 may have been a monk of Corvey, but this is by no means certain. In p. 134, nos. 316-7, the family relationship between donor and beneficiary is uncertain.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133, no 307.

the majority of new monks came to Corvey as youngsters who were not yet legally capable of making a profession or disposing of their property themselves.

It seems improbable that this pattern only emerged in the second half of the tenth century. More likely, ninth-century Corvey shared the recruitment pattern characteristic of major Carolingian abbeys: most monks and nuns started religious life in childhood. Alas, the older part of the *Liber traditionum* does not allow for any definite conclusions. As said earlier, it is too patchy and disorganised for that, and tends to leave out the names of the sons on whose behalf gifts were made. Any systematic comparison with the monks' lists is thus rendered impractical. Moreover, gifts *pro remedio animae* seem to prevail in these older *traditiones*. With 166 monks entering Corvey between 822 and 877, there must have been many who added to the monastery's wealth, but only a few of them – mostly oblates – can be identified as such in the *Liber traditionum*.<sup>59</sup> These few references are interesting, for the older part of the *Liber traditionum* retains some elements of the protocol of the original charters: not only are witnesses mentioned, but in two cases it is explicitly stated that the oblation took place at the altar of the martyrs Stephen and Vitus.<sup>60</sup> It also contains the substantial gift made by the cleric Wala when he became monk in Corvey around 835. He donated everything he owned in 'a place called Bodriki and in other places', amounting to 'twelve *familiae* and adjacent lands'.<sup>61</sup> Given that oblates yielded either one *mansus cum familia*<sup>62</sup> or at best three of those,<sup>63</sup> this Wala must have been quite a catch for Corvey. That he

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-3, nos. 226, 230, 235, 236 and 237. Only in the two latter cases, the oblate's name is mentioned.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121, no. 226: 'Tradidit Reddag, quando filium obtulit ad reliquias sanctorum martirum Stephani atque Viti mansum I cum familia in Arwitti. Testes: Herimannus, Lutheri, Bardo, Haoaldus *et alii quatuor*'. For the sake of brevity, the eleventh-century compiler has not copied the names of all witnesses. The son was probably also called Reddagus (monks' list no. 140) and entered Corvey as an oblate in 868-870. See also no. 230, p. 221, which also omits the oblate's name. The relics of St Vitus only came to Corvey in 836.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123, no. 239: 'Tradidit Wala clericus in loco qui dicitur Bodriki quidquid habuit necnon et aliis locis, ut inter omnia sint familie XII cum territoriis adiacentibus. Testes: Raynmannus comes, Raynfried, Garuward, Aldbert *et alii quinque*'.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 226, 230.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 236-7.

was indeed an important man becomes clear from a list of nine witnesses, headed by a count.

In short, the Carolingian part of the *Liber traditionum* yields little information about recruitment patterns. Judging by the evidence from other monasteries and nunneries, we can only guess that ninth-century Corvey followed the general pattern of favouring child recruitment. But there obviously were those who, having made a donation *pro se*, entered the monastery in adulthood: the names of the donators Heloco, Wulfhard, Haulf, Redman and Asculf all appear in the list of monks.<sup>64</sup> The prevalence of child oblates is much more evident in the younger list of *traditiones*; it also shows that those oblates were treated as full members of the community, and not as 'prospective' monks.

The status and meaning of Corvey's *Liber traditionum* have fascinated and puzzled historians. Older research emphasised the material dotation of new monks rather than the 'remedy' of the donors' souls; moreover, its function has mostly been viewed in terms of record-keeping and proof. Clearly, Corvey attached paramount value to its newcomers being handed over with a proper dotation; instead of recording the *petitiones* of oblates and novices, as was customary in Rheims, Corvey listed their *donationes*. Still, there is no reason to rigidly separate the material and spiritual aspects of these gifts. When Rumolt in 837 donated property to St Gall for the upkeep of his oblate son Erchanger, he did so *pro remedio animae meae aeternaque compensatione*.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the gifts for the sustenance of Corvey's child oblates benefited the spiritual wellbeing of the donors.

Was the eleventh-century *Liber traditionum* indeed meant to be an instrument of proof, recording the evidence of past transactions of property? Its lay-out points in a different direction. Although the older part still retains the names of some witnesses, the compiler left them out when there were too many; for obvious reasons, he did so in the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 25, 31, 33, 38, and 80; cf. Schmid, 'Über die Eigenart der mittelalterlichen Gedenküberlieferung von Corvey', p. 187.

<sup>65</sup> *Urkundenbuch der Abtei Sankt Gallen*, vol. I, nr. 363, p. 338; see above, n. 20. As Karl Schmid rightly remarked, 'Schenkungen für den Unterhalt sind nicht ohne weiteres von solchen für das Seelenheil zu scheiden'. Schmid, 'Über die Eigenart der mittelalterlichen Gedenküberlieferung von Corvey', p. 186.



case of a gift witnessed by no fewer than 65 people.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, precisely in the younger part of the *Liber traditionum* – where proof must have been most relevant – the names of witnesses are absent, and text of the original donations has been severely abbreviated. As Peter Johanek has argued convincingly, ‘proof’ and ‘record’ by no means exhaust the meaning of these intriguing sources. There are good reasons for situating the *Liber traditionum* firmly in the context of monastic commemoration.<sup>67</sup> Only the happy few of Corvey’s donors ended up in the *Liber vitae* itself; this served as the centre-piece of commemorative documents, which was supplemented by others, such as this list of donors and their gifts.<sup>68</sup> This conclusion is supported by the frequently recurring expression ‘*pro remedio animae*’, as well as by the presence of gifts without any connection to the entry of new monks. Recording the gifts of child oblates was indeed important to Corvey, but it was certainly not the only aim of the *Liber traditionum*. This should be viewed in the larger context of donors and gifts worthy of commemoration.

The question remains, however, whether the commemorative purposes of the *Liber traditionum* were primarily an eleventh-century endeavour. Assuming that it was the result of compilation and editing rather than mere copying, it becomes difficult to ascertain the function of the original documents used by the eleventh-century compiler. Given the presence of witnesses in the older part of the *Liber traditionum*, the original records must indeed have served as proof and safeguard of material transactions. This was not their only function, however, as is shown by frequent references to the spiritual wellbeing of the donors. Recent exploration of Carolingian *traditiones* and charters has revealed an intricate connection between the written record of gifts

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<sup>66</sup> Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, p. 110, no. 163: ‘... et alii LVII. Omnes autem huic traditioni presentes fuerunt LXV. Maximam partem horum intermitto propter numero prolixitatem, presertim etiam, quod in alio registro omnes nominatim et expresse habentur, ex quo videlicet registro hec collecta in in unum conscripta sunt’. This remark by the eleventh-century compiler indicates that he did not simply copy his older material, but also edited it. According to Honselmann, however, this was an aside of someone who otherwise faithfully copied his older sources. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>67</sup> Johanek, ‘Die Corveyer Traditionen’; see also idem, ‘Zur rechtlichen Funktion von Traditionsnotiz’. Both articles brilliantly underline the connection between record-keeping and commemoration.

<sup>68</sup> Johanek, ‘Die Corveyer Traditionen’, pp. 130-3.

*per se* and the ensuing obligation of commemoration; as Johanek remarked, the very act of committing a gift to parchment, and of safeguarding its record in the monastic archives, convinced the donor that the recipients took seriously the obligation of long-term commemoration.<sup>69</sup> In Carolingian Corvey the gift of a child created an enduring link between the donor and the community, which was sufficiently tenacious to last for centuries. When commemorative activity was given a new impetus in eleventh-century Corvey, the memory of long-deceased benefactors from the early decades of the monastery's existence was still kept alive.

#### 6. CHILD OBLATION AND COMMEMORATION

The extant sources, however scanty, reveal that the registration of child oblates by no means followed a uniform practice. The profession list of St Gall and the Rheims register provide good examples of continuous record-keeping of new members of the community; conversely, San Salvatore produced an ad hoc list of oblates and donors, celebrating and commemorating a royal donor and his daughter. The brief list from Rheims headed by a count's son was also drawn up for a special occasion, probably for commemorative purposes. The evidence from Corvey was shaped by both continuous registration and ad-hoc celebration: its *Liber traditionum* and list of monks were compiled retrospectively, in an age of intensified commemoration, but their compilers drew upon the cumulative record-keeping of past centuries.

Child oblates were registered for a variety of reasons. According to Benedict's Rule, the function of the *petitio* was twofold: on the one hand it played a symbolic role during the profession and oblation rituals, on the other it served as lasting proof of the newcomer's entry into the community. Hence, the *petitio* should be kept in the monastery for future reference.<sup>70</sup> The *petitio* Benedict envisaged was to be deposited on the altar as a solemn symbol of the newcomer's definitive entry into the community. As I observed earlier, such charters obviously lost their meaning after the death of the monks in question. Things were different when the names of child oblates or their *petitiones* found their way into

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<sup>69</sup> Borgolte, 'Gedenkstiftungen in Sankt Gallener Urkunden'; Johanek, 'Die Corveyer Traditionen', p. 126.

<sup>70</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 29.

a codex. In such cases, the commemorative aspect of record-keeping tended to take precedence over its other functions; this certainly happened if, in the course of time, proof was no longer relevant.

Benedict's Rule was written long before the great upsurge of monastic commemoration in the last quarter of the eighth century, so understandably this practice was not on his mind when he wrote about the *petitio* of novices and oblates. The Carolingian commentaries followed him in this respect; except for the odd reference to the salvation of the oblate and his parents, Smaragdus and Hildemar apparently did not ascribe any commemorative purpose to the *petitio*. But the documents discussed here reveal a different pattern. Registration practice at St Remi implied that all oblates, along with their donors and witnesses – and the occasional novice – were united in a book which was regularly and solemnly deposited upon the altar. Thus, the codex enclosed a gradually growing community of monks and their relatives, who were collectively sanctified time and again. When a 'shortlist' headed by the count's son, Hilduinus, needed to be compiled, it was drawn from the register containing the *petitiones*; this is also an indication of the register's commemorative function. How could it be different in an age when lists of monks and nuns circulated widely between religious establishments, creating vast networks of mutual support by prayer?<sup>71</sup> Even when duties towards other *monasteria* weighed heavily, the most important commitment remained the obligation to pray for one's own community, which included the living as well as the dead, the monks or nuns as well as the lay benefactors. Lists of oblates and newly professed could therefore assume a dual function: as a record of entry, to be used as juridical proof, and as an ever expanding community, encompassing the dead and the living. If need be, they could easily be used as a source for more specific lists drawn up for the sake of *memoria*, such as the ones headed by Hilduinus and Gisla.

Together with the register of Rheims, the profession book of St Gall is a clear instance of such an on-going form of registration. Corvey obviously kept a careful record of its newcomers as well, although its original form remains hidden from us. It may well have been more extensive than the mere list of monks' names entered into the *Liber vitae*

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<sup>71</sup> Still fundamental in this respect: Schmid and Wollasch, 'Die Gemeinschaft der Lebenden und Verstorbenen'.

shortly after 1158, but there is no way of telling. The same goes for the initial form and purpose of Corvey's *Liber traditionum*, although it seems likely that this too originally combined administrative and commemorative functions. The very problem of constructing an adequate terminology reveals that these aspects were in fact none other than two sides of the same coin: through the symbolic *and* administrative act of committing a gift to parchment, religious houses bound themselves to work towards the salvation of their benefactors. This held true for all gifts made *pro remedio animae*, but sometimes a very special donor elevated all the rest to a higher plane, demanding intensified prayer activity. The *noticia* of San Salvatore/Santa Giulia is the best example of such a celebratory list. The arrival of a royal oblate called for a special commemoration, benefiting other parents and oblates of more modest status. Those compiling this *noticia* must have relied upon a running registration of child oblates which is no longer extant.

Carolingian registration of child oblates has only left scanty traces, but nonetheless, a pattern becomes visible: lists of child oblates and their donors became the object of monastic commemorative activity. This stands to reason, for what greater gift had parents to offer than their children? Child oblation was practiced within a society so eager to give *pro remedio animae* that Louis the Pious felt compelled to keep parents from virtually disinheriting their children.<sup>72</sup> Within this all-pervasive context of gift-giving and commemoration, it is obvious that the donation of a child engendered an obligation on the part of the recipient community to pray for the donor. The connection between child oblation and commemoration becomes visible only when we shed our modern habit of viewing any record of the transfer of property (including children) as probatory, first and foremost. Clearly, the *petitio* did have this function in the days of Benedict's Rule, but by the time Carolingian monasteries started registering child oblates in a systematic fashion, things had changed considerably. By the ninth century, registration and list-keeping created an enduring community on parchment, of which those who gave away their children also became a part.

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<sup>72</sup> *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818/819), c. 7, MGH Capit. I, p. 277.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MONASTICISM AND CHILD RECRUITMENT

#### 1. *NUTRITI AND CONVERSI*

Oblation was the mainstay of Carolingian monastic life along with other forms of child recruitment. This impression, gained from the few extant sources yielding numerical data, is confirmed by contemporary narratives. In contrast to the attitude prevalent in later centuries, this predominance of young recruits in the cloister met with neither censure nor criticism. Carolingian authors generally approved of child oblation. Though most often referring to boys, praise of a similar kind was directed also at girls. In a sermon for the nuns of Nôtre-Dame of Soissons, Abbot Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie (d. 859) collectively addressed them as a 'holocaust to the Lord'.<sup>1</sup> Child oblates, he said, were the most perfect embodiment of such a holocaust, for they represented a gift resulting from their parents' voluntary decision, while widows might have been driven to the convent by *necessitas*, wishing to escape the servitude of remarriage.<sup>2</sup> Oblation therefore was the purest expression of *voluntas*, bringing about a state of virginity which was the essence of liberty. Apart from being an interesting example of having one's cake and eating it (upholding the principle of voluntary vows while praising child oblation), Paschasius' discourse shows that he only recognised two kinds of newcomers: child

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<sup>1</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio*, III, p. 104, l. 937-43: 'Nihil enim aliud estis quam sacrificium Deo, vota parentum, possessio sancti Spiritus cuius infusione sanctificatae estis et nutritae. Siquidem enutritae lacte Verbi ab ineunte aetate inter angelorum frequentiam infra gregem Christi inter pascua vitae ac si in paradiso Dei inter alleluistica semper gaudia inter sacrificia et holocaustomata Dei'.

Paschasius had been brought up in Nôtre-Dame at Soissons; probably he came to the convent as a foundling. Cf. *ibid.*, Introduction, p. v; Brunhölzl, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur*, vol. I, pp. 369-70; see above, chapter II, § 2.

<sup>2</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio*, III, p. 103, r. 920-924: 'Nec tamen satis attendit talis quaecumque. Quoniam virgines semper ex voto veniunt et ex voluntate offerentur parentum potius quam ex necessitate. Porro viduas quam saepe necessitas cogit maxime tamen cum absolvuntur teste apostolo vinculo servitutis'. Paschasius was referring to 1 Cor 7, 39.

oblates and widows. Apparently, the category of the adult unwed novice freely making her own vows was too small to be taken into account. This state of affairs may have had something to do with the fact that the fate of young women was largely determined by their parents until a much higher age than men. Nôtre-Dame of Soissons may therefore have contained nuns who, though technically oblates, had come to the convent at an age when they were legally free to make their own profession. Paschasius' reference to the nuns as a holocaust, however, as well as his emphasis on the parental *voluntas*, indicate that he was addressing an audience consisting mostly of nuns donated in childhood. Similar opinions were expressed with regard to boys; monastic communities preferred them over adult *conversi*. The many *pueri* in the monastic schools may have been a burden to their educators, but they also provided malleable material, to be formed into ideal monks.

Monastic preference for child oblates tends to be explained in economic terms: parents handed over their children with a gift of land, thus adding to the community's wealth. Be this as it may, it is hard to see why such considerations should have made them preferable to adult novices. As the Corvey data show, the latter also came to the monastery bearing rich gifts.<sup>3</sup> It was taken for granted that newcomers would bring a *viaticum*, enabling the community to feed yet another mouth according to the dignity and status befitting religious, i.e. aristocratic, life. The fact that oblates generally received adequate literate training must have mattered even more. Carolingian religious communities were literate ones, if only because their main task, the *Opus Dei*, required a modicum of Latin literacy. Not every monk or nun was equally well educated, but the *scholastici* certainly represented the elite within the monastery; they were the yardstick against which all others were measured. Unlike the adult *conversi*, who might learn only the Creed, the Pater Noster and the penitential psalms, if they were up to it, the children growing up in the community were steeped in texts.<sup>4</sup> In large abbeys like Fulda or St Gall the training of *scholastici* had priority, not only in view of the *Opus Dei*, but also in order to provide adequate staff for the scriptorium. The

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<sup>3</sup> Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten*, nos. 239, 461 and 468, pp. 123 and 154-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Statuta Murbacensia*, c. 2, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 442. See also the epilogue, p. 449, about the use of Latin as a language for conversation among *scolastici*: 'Usum latinatis potius quam rusticitatis qui inter eos qui scolastici sunt sequuntur. In tali etenim confabulatione notitia scripturarum aliquoties magis quam lectione penetratur et dictandi usus discitur et ad discendum sensus acuitur'.

hagiographer Rudolf of Fulda wrote charters from the age of twelve onwards, signing himself *scholasticus et clericus*.<sup>5</sup>

Learning Latin as well as Carolingian script demanded long and elaborate instruction, which therefore was best started early in life; moreover, the children had to learn how to express themselves in writing as well as orally in the new language. The literate elite could switch effortlessly to Latin, if the nature of conversation so required. Ekkehard IV of St Gall tells a wonderful story of three Carolingian monks, whom he called 'the senators of our republic': Notker (the Stammerer), Tuotilo, and Ratpert. With the prior's permission, this threesome often met in the scriptorium during the interval between nightly offices to discuss Scripture. On one of these occasions, the officious monk Sindolf listened at the window, hoping to catch any 'bad talk' he might relay to higher authorities. Tuotilo got wind of this and immediately addressed his companions in Latin, 'of which Sindolf understood nothing whatsoever', urging Ratpert to fetch a stick and sneak up behind the eavesdropper. With Tuotilo suddenly grabbing Sindolf by the hair through the window, Ratpert then gave him a good hiding.<sup>6</sup>

Though this anecdote was recorded in the mid-eleventh century, it is by no means improbable in a ninth-century setting. The learned threesome represented the aristocratic, literate element within the community; they had all grown up in St Gall, which they considered their 'nest' (*nidus noster*).<sup>7</sup> Conversely, Sindolf was obviously illiterate in the early medieval sense of the word. He was probably a *conversus* of lower birth, debarred for both these reasons from the old boy network. To compensate for this, he tried to ingratiate himself with the Abbot-Bishop Salomo III (d. 919), who put him first in charge of the refectory and later of building works. He seems to have had practical skills, whereas the three 'senators' excelled in sacred learning. In Ekkehard's tale, they are the heroes who justifiably looked down on this upstart, all the more so since he had succeeded in gaining more influence than was warranted by his lack of literate training and his humble origins.

The tension that might have arisen between *nutriti* and *conversi*, especially if the latter came from a lower social class, is understandable.

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<sup>5</sup> Sandmann, 'Wirkungsbereiche fuldischer Mönche', p. 707.

<sup>6</sup> Ekkehard, *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 35, pp. 80-2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 75, p. 156: '... domicilium autem, quod per sanctum Gallum nidus noster est ...'; *ibid.*, c. 5, p. 24: 'intima nostra'.

In a later especially Cistercian context, the expression *conversus* would come to designate a separate group of lay monks of lower-class extraction, the 'worker bees' of the community as opposed to the generally aristocratic and literate choir monks. Such a distinction, however, only began to arise in the eleventh century. Earlier, a *conversus* was simply a monk who was not a *nutritus*, brought up in the cloister.<sup>8</sup> He could be an upstart like Sindolf or an aristocrat who, hoping that monastic garb would help him in facing death and judgment, had decided to convert towards the end of his life (*ad succurrendum*).

One of the main reasons, however, for adults to enter monastic life at a relatively late age was the performance of a penance. As noted earlier, the rigours of 'canonical' penance made it remarkably similar to the monastic state. Penitents were classed with oblates and adult novices in the seventh-century Visigothic church: none of them was allowed to break his vows.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, several sixth-century councils in Gaul indicate that penance was considered as on a par with monastic conversion.<sup>10</sup> The expression *professio* was used repeatedly in a penitential context, though its serious consequences made it an unsuitable punishment for younger lay people. Like entry into monastic life, a penance should never be undertaken without the consent of one's spouse; those who had received the *benedictio penitentiae* were debarred from returning to the world. Penance was thus as serious an undertaking as a *conversio*, resembling it in many respects. Traditional 'canonical' penance had consequences far beyond the period of atonement itself; one of the ways to comply with these severe obligations was to enter a monastery or convent.

By the ninth century penitential practice had changed, in that a revived form of canonical penance, called *paenitentia publica*, was now imposed for particularly scandalous crimes, while sins which had not attracted public notice came under the regime of 'secret' penance (*paenitentia occulta*). Public penitents often spent their period of penance in a monastery or convent; from there, it was only a small step to entering

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<sup>8</sup> Grundmann, 'Adelsbekehrungen'; Teske, 'Laien, Laienmönche und Laienbrüder'.

<sup>9</sup> *Lex Visigothorum*, III, 5, 3, pp. 161-3; see above, chapter I, § 4.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Epaon (a. 517), c. 23, *Concilia Galliae*, vol. II, p. 30; council of Orléans (a. 538), cc. 6 and 28-9, *ibid.*, pp. 116-7 and 124-5. Cf. De Jong, 'Power and humility', pp. 43-4.



religious life forever.<sup>11</sup> Though public penance and monastic life were by no means identical, they definitely formed a continuum. A comparison between the rituals of public penance and those of monastic profession also makes this clear: in both, the deposition of arms – or, symbolically, the sword-belt (*cingulum militiae*) – on the altar was a central element.<sup>12</sup>

The picture formed is one of a monasticism in which the ideal monk of the Rule of Benedict – the adult novice voluntarily joining the community – was the exception rather than the rule. *Nutriti* dominated the scene, while adult novices often ended up in monasteries only as the result of some sort of punishment, be it a penance or political imprisonment. This also held true for women, but in their case the desire to escape remarriage must have provided an additional incentive for conversion. Paschasius Radbertus' remark about widows being driven to the cloister by *necessitas* should indeed be taken seriously. The archetypal monks or nuns of late antiquity who had freely taken their vows in young adulthood were few and far between in the Carolingian age. The population of religious institutions in those days had indeed all the characteristics of a conscript army.

This situation may even have contributed to an adaptation of the Benedictine profession formula. According to the Rule, the novice had to promise *de stabilitate sua et de conversatione morum et oboedientia*, thus expressing his willingness to commit himself forever to a life of complete obedience to the abbot within that particular monastic community.<sup>13</sup> The third part of the vows, *conversatio morum*, is as complicated as it is vague, meaning approximately 'a life worthy of a monk'. Its connotations were readily understood by Benedict's contemporaries, who shared his spiritual vocabulary, but to later generations of monks from the Frankish kingdoms who adopted the Rule, *conversatio morum* had become meaningless as well as superfluous. The expression was either dropped altogether from the profession formula, which now only consisted of a two-fold vow of *stabilitas* and *oboedientia*, or substituted by the more

<sup>11</sup> When in 833 rebellious sons and bishops imposed a public penance on Louis the Pious, they clearly did so on the understanding that he would be incapacitated as a ruler for the rest of his life; while being a captive penitent in St Médard, Louis was being pressured into taking the final and logical step: making his profession and becoming a monk. Cf. De Jong, 'Power and humility'.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Leyser, 'Early Medieval Canon Law'; also De Jong, 'Power and humility', 44-5.

<sup>13</sup> *RB*, c. 58, 17. Cf. De Vogüé, 'Persévérer au monastère jusqu'à la mort'.

understandable term *conversio morum*.<sup>14</sup> Even when the Aachen reforms attempted to enforce the use of the threefold vows, most communities did not adapt the expression *conversatio*. According to the formula in St Gall's profession register, the monks promised *conversio morum meorum*; many others in the Carolingian realm stuck to this, including Hildemar of Civate.<sup>15</sup>

The confusion over *conversio morum* cannot be explained entirely by the concept's lack of precision, for Hildemar understood very well what was meant by it: a certain way of life. He preferred *conversio* because it conformed to his idea of what the profession of an adult monk entailed, namely a radical break with the world from which he came.<sup>16</sup> Such a vow made little sense in the case of young children handed over by their parents, for they had never been 'of the world'. The growing number of child oblates may have been one of the reasons for dropping the third part of the vow altogether. Predictably, it was absent from the *petitio* for oblates adopted by the council of Aachen (817), although this text allocates a central place to stability and obedience, stating that never again was the young oblate to shake off 'the yoke of the Rule'. If those making their profession had already lived in the monastery for a long time, neither *conversatio* nor *conversio* could have retained much meaning. After all, they had already lived according to a *conversatio monastica* from the days of their childhood; for similar reasons, their profession could hardly be understood as a *conversio*. This concept was reserved for those who had really lived in 'the world', and for whom entry into monastic life indeed entailed a radical change of lifestyle.

Between the eighth and the eleventh century, the number of such adult *conversi* remained comparatively low. A tale like that of Sindolf's

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<sup>14</sup> Herwegen, *Geschichte der benediktinischen Profießformel*; Hoppenbrouwer, *Conversatio*.

<sup>15</sup> Krieg (ed.), *Das Profießbuch*, pp. 16-9; Herwegen, *Geschichte der benediktinischen Profießformel*, pp. 57-60; Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 58, pp. 539 and 541.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 532-3: 'Sciendum est enim, quia aliud est *conversatio* et aliud est *conversio*. *Conversatio* enim attinet ad vitam et habitationem, *conversio* vero est de saeculo ad Deum, sicut in hoc loco dicitur, Quidam namque libri habent *conversio-nem*, quidam vero *conversationem*, sed sicut mihi videtur, melius habent illi, qui dicunt *conversionem*, quam illi, qui *conversationem*, eo quod *conversatio* attinet ad habitationem et ad vitam sive bonam sive malam, *conversio* autem ad mutationem sive de malo in bonum, sive de bono in malum, veluti in hoc capitulo habetur, cum de *conversatione* saeculari ad monasticam vitam convertitur'.

collision with the three learned monks is indeed quite exceptional, and may have been told more to make fun of upstarts in aristocratic monasteries than to deride those who did not belong to the old boy network of former oblates. The number of adult *conversi* remained too low to threaten the unassailable position of *nutriti* until the second half of the eleventh century. When things started changing and child oblation came under attack, the 'old style' monks defended themselves with the argument that, having lived in the cloister all their lives, they were without sin, while adult *conversi* would remain contaminated by the filth of the outside world.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, these *nutriti* derived their self-respect and religious identity from the conviction that they had retained their purity from childhood onwards. By then, this opinion was the defence of a minority under attack, but in the Carolingian era it was the prevailing one. Moreover, it takes us to the heart of the reasons why early medieval religious institutions preferred children over adult novices.

## 2. OBLATES, PURITY AND PRIESTHOOD

To early monastic authors the similarity between childhood and the monastic state appeared obvious. Understandably so, for had not Christ promised the kingdom of heaven to those who would humble themselves as little children? Humility was at the core of monastic life, and children represented the embodiment of this virtue. According to John Cassian, the cowl should be worn to preserve childlike simplicity and innocence,<sup>18</sup> while Leo the Great called childhood the *magistra humilitatis*.<sup>19</sup> Virtues considered typical of young children were indeed prominent amongst the qualities shaping monastic humility. Boys did not bear a grudge, they did

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<sup>17</sup> *Liber Anselmi de humanis moribus*, c. 78, p. 68. Writing in 1115-1117, Guibert of Nogent remembered such sentiments having prevailed in the monasteries of his youth; as he noted, 'the less these monks were afraid of their own sins (for they imagined they had committed none), the more they lived a life of slackened zeal within the walls of their monasteries'. Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, I, c. 8, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> John Cassian, *Institutiones*, I, c. 3, pp. 42: 'Cucullis namque perparvis usque ad cervicis umerorumque demissis confinia, qui capita tantum contegant, indesinenter diebus utuntur ac novitibus, scilicet ut innocentiam et simplicitatem parvulorum iugiter custodire etiam imitatione ipsius velaminis commoneantur'.

<sup>19</sup> Leo the Great, *Sermones*, vol. I, no. 18, c. 3, p. 280: 'Amat Christus infantiam, humilitatis magistrum ad quam majorum dirigit mores, ad quam senum reducit aetates; et eos ad suum inclinatur exemplum, quos ad regnum sublimatur aeternum'.

not persist in anger, they were not tempted by beautiful women and they did not say anything except what they really thought;<sup>20</sup> such were the merits customarily ascribed to children, to which Bede added a fifth virtue: obedience. Only those who were as obedient as children, he wrote, would be capable of fathoming Christian truth.<sup>21</sup> The virtues of children constituted the *innocentia* required for inheriting God's kingdom.

But the notion of childlike innocence was not universally held, certainly not in the context of the doctrine of original sin. Augustine denied that there was such a thing as childish innocence; children had no means to express themselves, but were they able to speak, it would become clear enough that they were as sinful as adults. Whoever had witnessed a baby's jealous rage could not seriously defend the idea that such a screaming little monster was innocent.<sup>22</sup> Gregory the Great also considered speech as the instrument of sin, but his views were diametrically opposed to those of Augustine: the *infantes*' inability to speak prevented them from expressing their innocence.<sup>23</sup> Once they started to talk, however, they became capable of evil, and would no longer automatically go to the celestial Jerusalem when they died. From that age onwards, it was the parents' task to keep their offspring from erring. Gregory drove this truth home by telling a story of a five-years old son of indulgent parents who had fallen into the habit of cursing; in spite of his tender age, devils took him off to Hell.<sup>24</sup>

To Gregory, speech was a prerequisite for sin. His conviction that speechless infants were innocent was shared by Isidore of Seville. Although Isidore faithfully reiterated Augustine's opinion,<sup>25</sup> he gave

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<sup>20</sup> Isidorus, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, XL, 54, col. 207; Columbanus, *Epistolae*, no. 2, p. 163.

<sup>21</sup> Bede, *In Marci evangelio expositio*, III, x, 15, p. 559.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones*, I, c. 7, 11, p. 6: 'Ita imbecillitas membrorum infantium innocens est, non animus infantium. Vidi ego et expertus sum zelantem parvulum: nondum loquebatur et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu conlactaneum suum. Quis hoc ignorat?'

<sup>23</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, XI, XLVI, 62, p. 621: 'Prima quippe hominis aetas infantia est, cum etsi innocenter vivit, nescit tamen fari innocentiam quam habet. Ac deinde pueritia sequitur, in qua iam valet dicere quod vult; cui succedit adolescentia quae videlicet prima est aetas in operatione ...'.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, IV, c. 19, pp. 72-4.

<sup>25</sup> Isidore, *Sententiarum libri III*, I, c. 13, 6, col. 564: 'Innoxios esse infantes opere, non esse innoxios cogitatione, quia motum quem gerunt mente nondum possunt explere opere, ac per hoc in illis aetas est imbecillis, non animus. Ad nutum

himself away by wondering why little children were eaten by wild animals. Baptism had cleansed them of original sin, and they were as yet too young to sin, so why were they punished all the same? Isidore commented that baptism liberated humankind from eternal punishment, but not from the tribulations of earthly existence. Therefore, guiltless children could also be hit by disaster.<sup>26</sup>

The theme of childlike innocence did provide food for thought among early medieval authors. Their haphazard comments did not amount to anything like a 'theology of infancy',<sup>27</sup> but they reveal a consistent disagreement with Augustine's pessimistic stance. Not that children were always viewed in a favourable light, to say nothing of adolescents, who because of their sexual awakening received a very different treatment. The maxim *nihil incertius quam vitam adolescentium* became the guiding principle of monastic educators.<sup>28</sup> But even children who had not yet reached puberty generated ambivalent attitudes. The hagiographical topos of the 'grey-haired boy' (*puer senex*) suggested that true saints could never have been real children; if all was well, they displayed an old man's wisdom in their infancy.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the hagiographers' enthusiastic praise

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enim voluntatis nondum obtemperat illis fragilitas corporis; nec adeo opere nocere possunt, sicut cogitatione moventur'.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, 3, col. 588-9: 'Cur parvuli peccato originali carentes per baptismum, et necdum proprium habens delictum, a bestiis poenisque caeteris laniantur? Haec igitur causa est: baptismus enim a poena aeterna, non a praesenti vitae supplicio liberat. Quod si a poena praesenti homines liberarentur per baptismam, ipsum putarent baptismi praemium, non illud aeternum. Ergo, soluto reatu peccati, manet tamen quaedam temporalis poena, ut illa vita ferventius requiratur quae erit a poenis omnibus aliena'.

<sup>27</sup> Leclercq, 'Pédagogie et formation spirituelle'.

<sup>28</sup> Fourth council of Toledo (a. 633), c. 24, p. 201-2, as paraphrased by the council of Aachen (816), c. 135, MGH Conc. II, 1, p. 413, with the following opening sentences: 'Sollerter rectores ecclesiarum vigilare oportet, ut pueri et adolescentes, qui in congregatione sibi commissi nutriuntur vel erudiuntur, ita iugibus ecclesiasticis disciplinis constringantur, ut eorum lasciva aetas et ad peccandum valde proclivis nullum possit repperire locum, quo in peccati facinus proruat'. Cf. Gn 8, 21: '... quia cogitatio humani cordis in malum prona est ab adolescentia sua'.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory the Great, *In evangelia homiliae*, I, 14, 5, col. 1130; idem, *Dialogi*, II, prol., p. 126-8; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, p. 171; idem, *Vita Radegundis*, c. 2, p. 365; *Vita Sollemni*, c. 2, p. 312; *Vita Bertuini*, c. 1, p. 178; Paul of Fulda, *Vita Erhardi*, c. 2, pp. 10-11. About this topos, see Curtius, *Europäische Literatur*, pp. 108-13.

for the virtuous childhood of their subjects indicates that they viewed 'normal' children as a nuisance at best.

Nonetheless, early medieval hagiographical discourse also provides telling references to a perceived continuum between childlike and monastic innocence. For example, their purity enabled children to behold miracles hidden to adults. This theme was particularly prominent in Merovingian hagiography depicting the liturgical activities of nuns, which reflects the importance of the innocence of *puellae oblatae* within this context.<sup>30</sup> Rusticula, the third abbess of St Jean at Arles, was portrayed as a girl barely five year old, who sleepily crept onto an older nun's lap while the other children were reciting their psalms; napping through the entire office, she nonetheless was able to reproduce every psalm that had been sung into her ear.<sup>31</sup> The story reveals both the hagiographer's ability to sympathetically observe childhood and his (or her?) implicit assumption that little girls take part in communal liturgy. Judging by Jonas of Bobbio, this was also regular practice in Burgundofara's nunnery. Jonas relates a tale about a ball of fire coming from the mouth of a certain Domna during Sunday mass; it was only visible to two *infantulae*, 'whose innocence made them immaculate'.<sup>32</sup> This particular incident happened during the highly charged moment when Domna, sanctified by communion, resumed her place in the choir to continue singing; the entire community was present, including the *infantulae* presumably witnessing the miracle. Jonas seems to have taken a particular delight in highlighting the innocence of girls. Burgundofara herself is a case in point, having been blessed by

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<sup>30</sup> Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 305-9.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita Rusticula*, c. 6, p. 342: 'Nam fertur aliquando, dum infans psalmos pararet, et ut adsolet infantia, sompno occuparetur, recumbens in genua uni de sororibus, psalmum et ipsa in aure dicebat. Quae mox ut expergefata fuisset, tamquam si eum legisset, ita memoriter recensebat, implens illud scripturae dictum: Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat' (Ct 5, 2).

<sup>32</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, II, c. 16, pp. 135-6: 'Quadam etenim die dominico cum missarum sollemnia saepefacta Burgundofara cum famularum Dei collegio expectaret, et iam sacri corporis communione participarentur, quaedam ex his nomine Domna, cum iam corpus Domini accepisset ac sanguinem libasset, et sacro chora inserta, cum comparibus caneret: *Hoc sacrum corpus Domini et salvatoris sanguinem sumite vobis in vitam perennem*, in ore eius globus igneus candido fulgore rutilans micabat. Sed cum a nulla adstante ignis inlustratio perspiceretur, duae infantulae comminus adstantes, quas innocentia immaculatas reddebat, conspiciantur radios ab ore supradictae inter cantus modulamina eximio fulgore...'

Columban when she was a little girl;<sup>33</sup> there is the *adulescentula* Deurechilda, who entered the convent with her mother and turned out to become a much better nun than her parent;<sup>34</sup> and then there is Er-cantrudis, whom Burgundofara educated so carefully that she could no longer tell the difference between men and women.<sup>35</sup>

This theme of childlike innocence was no doubt inspired by biblical *sancta simplicitas* (Mt 5, 3). God reveals his truth to the simple and the innocent; this was Benedict's motive for involving the whole monastic community, youngsters included, in crucial decisions.<sup>36</sup> An important element was added by Jonas, however: the two little girls were uncontaminated by sexuality (*immaculatae*). Precisely their purity permitted them to observe the miraculous. Such hagiographical anecdotes reveal that women who had embraced virginity in childhood were held in high esteem by Jonas and his public; their central role in monastic prayer had not yet been eclipsed by the rise of the priest-monks.

In many religious cults, young children are accorded a prominent role, for their purity allows them to approach the sacred without trepidation.<sup>37</sup> Because of the central importance of preaching, such was less the case in Christianity. The tongues of children might be loosened miraculously, but nobody should therefore think that preaching was permitted before the thirtieth year, said Gregory the Great. Doctrine and discipline belonged to one realm, miracles to another.<sup>38</sup> Speaking babies remained extremely attractive to hagiographers and their public, however, especially if they were able to clear saints from the humiliating charge of having fathered an illegitimate child.<sup>39</sup> And young children assumed the role of innocent and pure mediators in sacred affairs in Christianity also. They were the

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 26, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, II, c. 15, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 13, p. 133.

<sup>36</sup> *RB*, c. 3, 3: 'Ideo autem omnes ad consilium vocari diximus, quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est'.

<sup>37</sup> Van der Leeuw, 'Virginibusque puerisque'; Herter, 'Das unschuldige Kind'.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, I, no. 2, c. 4, p. 19: 'Nec contra haec movere quempiam debet quod Hieremias atque Danihel prophetiae spiritum pueri perceperunt, quia miracula in exemplo operationis non sunt trahenda. Omnipotens enim Deus et linguas infantium facit disertas, et ex ore infantium perficit laudem. Sed aliud est quod nos de doctrinae usu atque disciplina dicimus, aliud quod de miraculo scimus'.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, lib. II, c. 1, p. 37; *Vita Goaris*, c. 7, pp. 417-9.

ones to draw the *sortes biblicae*, that is, divination from the Bible,<sup>40</sup> and when three Frankish lords quarrelled over the remains of St Fursey, they had two boys under seven pull the cart with the bier, assuming that the saint would reveal to innocent children where he wished to be buried.<sup>41</sup> Frisian law also used a *puer innocens* to clarify divine intentions, showing that the idea of innocents having special access to the sacred was alive outside as well as inside clerical circles.<sup>42</sup>

Such views must have contributed to the belief that through an early upbringing in the cloister, childlike purity could be preserved and exploited for ritual purposes. Alcuin wrote of the young Willibrord that he was taken straight from his mother's breast to Ripon, 'where he saw nothing but what was honourable, and heard nothing except what was holy'.<sup>43</sup> A ninth-century hagiographer compared Bede to Samuel, 'innocent of contamination of any vestment, and placed by his parents under monastic rule ...'.<sup>44</sup> The expression *ullius vestimenti* referred to the boy's enduring innocence, both in the lay and the monastic state: whatever his vestment, he remained free from pollution. Possibly the author also

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<sup>40</sup> Courcelle, 'L'Enfant et les sorts bibliques'.

<sup>41</sup> *Virtutes Fursei*, cc. 16-9, pp. 445-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Lex Frisionum*, XIV, 1, p. 56-7. When a man has been killed in a crowd and the murderer cannot be found, the dead has to be brought to church, where lots are put onto the altar; meanwhile, God is implored to clarify whether those who swore innocence did so truthfully. Either a priest or an innocent boy should draw the lot from the altar: '... et presbyter, si adfuerit, vel si presbyter deest puer quilibet innocens, unum de ipsis sortibus de altari tollere debet ...'. Traditionally, young boys seem to have played a prominent part in pagan Frisian cults, also as victims who were sacrificed by allowing them to be swallowed by tidal waters; the *Life* of St Vulfram contains the gruesome story of two boys of five and seven years old being thus sacrificed to 'demons'; cf. *Vita Vulframni*, c. 8, p. 667. See also *ibid.*, c. 6, p. 665-6, and Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, c. 11, p. 125. I am grateful to Ian Wood for having called my attention to these texts.

<sup>43</sup> Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, c. 3, pp. 117-8. See also Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, c. 7, p. 124: 'Crevit igitur puella et tanta abbatisae cunctarumque sororum cura erudiebatur, ut nihil aliud praeter monasterium et caelestis disciplinae cognosceret'.

<sup>44</sup> *Vita Alcuini*, c. 4, pp. 186-7: 'et in viro Deo nimium amabili Beda presbytero, proprio praeceptore suo, qui ab ineunte aetate quasi Samuhel Domino consecratus, inscius coinquinationis ullius vestimenti, monasticis traditus a parentibus regulis ...'. The hagiographer was eager to underline Alcuin's scholastic pedigree, presenting him as the pupil – directly or indirectly – of Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury, Benedict Biscop, St Cuthbert, Theodore of Canterbury, Bede and Egbert of York.



implied a reference to Bede's ultimate and most important *vestmentum*: his priestly robes.

These texts highlight why the purity of boys was increasingly considered a valuable asset, for they were the ones to become priests. By the ninth century, sexual purity had become a *conditio sine qua non* of ideal priesthood, and monks who had been brought up in the cloister admirably came up to these expectations.<sup>45</sup> This close link between monasticism and priesthood – so typical of the Carolingian church – implied a crucial deviation from older monastic ideals. Early monastic communities were made up of laymen fleeing the world and all that belonged to it, including the established secular clergy. Monasticism long retained a strong aversion to the clergy's supposedly worldly way of life. Benedict's Rule still displays traces of this traditional attitude. The Rule considers the possibility of a monk's elevation to the priesthood, as well as the presence of priests from outside who might join the community. It even places priests in a relatively high position in the hierarchy. Yet Benedict viewed their presence with some misgivings, warning against the dangerous consequences of their *superbia*.<sup>46</sup> He could afford to do so, for in the community he envisaged, mass was celebrated only on Sundays and feast days, so that in Benedict's time monks attended mass no more frequently than laymen. Celebrating mass was not yet a self-evident aspect of the *Opus Dei*.<sup>47</sup>

Hildemar's commentary reveals how much things had changed by the mid-ninth century. By then, the celebration of mass loomed large in the daily liturgical routine of the monks. Conventual mass was celebrated twice daily, and in addition monastic priests also celebrated 'private' masses, which did not require the presence of a congregation.<sup>48</sup> The masses for the living and the dead, which entailed a large amount of altar

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<sup>45</sup> Angenendt, "Mit reinen Händen", pp. 311-4.

<sup>46</sup> *RB*, cc. 60 and 62.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Häussling, *Mönchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier*, pp. 26-31, who concludes that, compared with the Rule of the Master, Benedict represents a later stage in the clericalisation of monasticism; according to the Master, the monks celebrated Sunday mass with the local community instead of in their own oratory. Whether Benedict indeed represents some kind of evolution depends largely on one's stance in the revived *Regula Magistri-Regula Benedicti* debate; cf. Dunn, 'Mastering Benedict', and De Vogüé, 'The Master and Benedict'. About mass in Benedict's Rule, see also Steidle, 'Missae in der Regel St. Benedikts', and idem, *Usque ad missas sustineant*.

<sup>48</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 38, p. 423; *ibid.*, c. 60, p. 555. Cf. Häussling, *Mönchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier*, pp. 58-9.

service, had become an integral part of the monastic liturgy.<sup>49</sup> Not surprisingly, Hildemar's community of thirty-five monks who were entered into the confraternity book of Pfäfers counted eleven priests, six deacons and two subdeacons.<sup>50</sup> In a large community like Fulda, the number of monks in orders was even more staggering. Of the list of 603 monks of Fulda which Hrabanus had drawn up in 825/826, roughly 70% were in major orders.<sup>51</sup> Of the others, many must have been young *clerici*, the usual Carolingian designation for all those in minor orders. Priesthood was no longer a cause for distrust, as it had been in Benedict's days. On the contrary, it had become the pinnacle of a monastic career. As Hrabanus' list reveals, hierarchy within his community was determined by clerical ordination rather than by seniority: priests were mentioned first, followed by deacons and subdeacons, while unordained monks closed the ranks.

Carolingian monasteries had become first and foremost institutions of prayer. The commemoration of the living and the dead began taking shape in the last decades of the eighth century, growing into an all-consuming business in the course of the ninth, when the laity also wished to benefit from it. The outside demand for masses was connected with changing eschatological perspectives, which also contributed so much to the development of early medieval penance: people believed that a judgement and reckoning would follow immediately after death.<sup>52</sup> The celebration of mass became even more crucial in penitential practice; psalters and masses could be substituted for penances, with conversion tables drawn up to calculate suitable equivalents.<sup>53</sup> Amalarius of Metz neatly summed up the penitential aspect of mass: 'All these sacrifices have been offered by the priest as well as by the people, so that the Almighty God would not

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<sup>49</sup> Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> *Liber Viventium Fabariensis*, vol. I, p. 120

<sup>51</sup> Schmid, 'Mönchslisten'.

<sup>52</sup> Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie der mittelalterlichen Totenmemoria'; Oexle, 'Die Gegenwart der Toten'; Gurevich, 'Perceptions of the individual and the hereafter'.

<sup>53</sup> Angenendt, 'Missa specialis'. But see also McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 239-43, who suggests that the numbers mentioned in the conversion tables had a symbolical rather than a quantitative significance. She may be right in doubting the sheer 'instrumentality' of such conversion tables, but this does not detract from Angenendt's important conclusions concerning the sacrificial and expiatory nature of early medieval mass.

count our sins'.<sup>54</sup> But mass was believed to be effective in more areas of life than that of penance. A glance at Carolingian sacramentaries, many of them originating from monasteries, shows that there were masses for all possible purposes, from warding off bad weather to producing fertility in a barren woman.

This perception of mass as a means of procuring divine favour or warding off God's wrath presupposes that this ritual was in itself a gift which could be offered to God, and this is precisely what Amalarius' comment implies. For him, however, the participation of 'the people' remained important; he was writing of the *missa publica*, attended by a congregation which collectively shared in the priest's sacrifice. But monks were mostly preoccupied with votive masses (*missae speciales* – later known as 'private masses') which could be celebrated without any congregation being present.<sup>55</sup> Priests offered such masses on behalf of specific individuals or groups, on the assumption that such special masses would especially benefit those who had paid for them. Thus, the function of the central ritual of the church had changed dramatically. From a celebration of the unity of the entire *ecclesia* with Christ, mass had become a gift (*munus*), for which a counter-gift (*remuneratio*) was to be expected by 'private' groups and individuals. Votive masses proliferated to such an extent that they distracted the attention of the faithful from the communal mass (*missa publica*).<sup>56</sup> Understandably so, for the laity had a vested interest in the proceedings, as they had in their donations of land which they made *pro remedio animae*. In both cases, the gift served the

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<sup>54</sup> Amalarius of Metz, *Expositio missae*, c. 55, p. 322: 'Haec omnia sacrificia ideo sunt offerta, tam a sacerdote quam a populo, ut omnipotens Deus peccata nostra non reputet'. He made a distinction between *dona* (voluntary gifts without expectation of a reward) and *munera*, for which some kind of counter-gift might be expected.

<sup>55</sup> Nußbaum, *Kloster, Priestermonch und Privatmesse*, situated the rise of the 'private' mass and monks in orders in the eleventh century; since he explored the topic, however, it has become clear that this process was already well under way in the first half of the ninth century. See Häussling, *Mönchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier*; Leclercq, 'Monachisme, sacerdoce et missions'; Vogel, 'Une mutation culturelle'; idem, 'La multiplication des messes solitaires'. The evidence from the *libri vitae* abundantly confirms this view.

<sup>56</sup> Theodulf of Orléans already complained about this at the beginning of the ninth century: *Capitulaire I*, c. 45, p. 141: 'Ut missae, quae per dies dominicos peculiares a sacerdotibus fiunt, non ita in publico fiant, ut per eas populus a publicis missarum sollemnibus, quae hora tertia canonice fiunt, abatrahantur ...'. Cf. Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', p. 179; Häussling, *Mönchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier*, pp. 248-51.

specific salvation of their kinsmen or themselves, rather than the abstract notion of a universal *ecclesia* which still prevailed in the 'public' mass.

The load of this ever increasing demand for masses fell mostly onto the shoulders of specialised ascetics, that is monks and canons. Unlike humble local priests, they were at liberty to devote themselves to liturgical duties. More importantly, because of their sexual purity, members of ascetic communities were considered to be the most efficacious mediators between God and mankind.<sup>57</sup> Whoever dared to approach the 'terrible sacraments' in a state of impurity would fail as a mediator.<sup>58</sup> This attitude diverged widely from Augustine's teaching that the efficacy of the sacraments depended entirely on the priestly consecration, and was therefore independent of individual priests' moral life. Augustine's view remained the official one, but early medieval laity and clergy thought otherwise. They were generally convinced that priests had to have 'clean hands' in order to celebrate the Eucharist effectively. This led to a rapid increase of the number of monks in orders, while on the other hand communities of secular clerics – the *clerici canonici* – tended to live more and more 'monastically'. By the early 800s the rapprochement between monks and canons was such that it had become very hard to tell them apart. After the Aachen reforms of 816/817, the only criterion by which one could identify a *monachus* was the fact that he lived under the Rule of Benedict.<sup>59</sup>

Bearing in mind that sexual purity was considered the prime prerequisite for good mediatorship, it is clear why hagiographers hailed the uncontaminated state of saintly child oblates. Having lived within the cloister from their days of childish innocence, boy oblates were eminently qualified for the priesthood. Of course their long literate training was also an important asset. Celebrating mass was learned in practice as well in

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<sup>57</sup> Angenendt, 'Religiosität und Theologie', esp. p. 40. Boniface's fear of of having to eat and converse with unclean priests is characteristic; cf. Boniface, *Epistolae*, no. 26, p. 47. See also the 'cleansing operation' of the *Concilium Germanicum* (742), MGH Conc. I, cc. 1-2, 6-7, pp. 3-4.

<sup>58</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare I*, c. 44, p. 140: 'Quia, sicut periculosum est impurum quemque ad tantum sacramentum accedat, ita etiam periculosum est ab hoc prolixo tempore abstinere sola ratione eorum, qui excommunicati non quando eis libet, sed certis temporibus communicant, et religiosi quibusque sancte viventibus, qui paene omni die id faciunt'.

<sup>59</sup> Creating a distinction between *monachi* and *canonici* was one of the main goals of the Aachen reforms; see Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils'; idem, 'Mönche und Kanoniker'; De Jong, 'Carolingian Monasticism'.

theory, for this important skill was part of the curriculum of the monastic school; one master from St Gall grumbled that so many masses were celebrated in the school-room that he refused to attend yet another outside of it.<sup>60</sup> Their schooling gave the *nutriti* an important edge, for older *conversi* who barely managed to master a few psalms were hardly eligible for the priesthood. But first and foremost it was the oblates' carefully guarded sexual purity which made them eminently suited for the priesthood.

Hildemar's commentary on the Rule is an important witness to this prevailing attitude. His small community of St Peter's in Civate certainly harboured a school, for it was there that he dictated his commentary to his pupils. But he devoted precious little attention to their intellectual training, while becoming positively expansive when it came to their moral education. A strong consciousness of the deep gulf separating *claustrum* and *saeculum* pervades Hildemar's work; he took infinite care over sequestering his monks within the cloister, while warding off the undue influence of the ever present world outside. Those who came to the *claustrum* early in life could preserve their childish innocence, using it as the foundation for monastic purity. To Hildemar, these children had actually never belonged to 'the world'. For this reason they should never be punished by expulsion, as one could do with those culprits who had entered later in life. The *nutriti* should not be expelled to a world they had never been part of; if they proved to be unmanageable, imprisonment was the only remedy.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, he considered children who had been brought

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<sup>60</sup> Ekkehard, *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 34, p. 78 (about Ratpert): 'In scolis sedulus plerumque cursus et missas negligebat: "Bonas", inquiens, "missas audimus, cum eas agi docemus"'.

<sup>61</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 2, p. 109: 'Hic talis est expellendus de monasterio, ita tamen, si ille laicus venit de seculo et vult reverti ad seculum: nam si in illo monasterio crevit et didicit ordinem monachorum et vult ad peiorem conversationem ire et hoc abbas perpenderit, quia ita est, non debet expelli, ut ad peiorem conversationem vadat, sed debet mitti in carcerem, ut ibi tamdiu stet, donec cupiat manere in monasterio et suscipere eius disciplinam'. *Ibid.*, c. 28, p. 363: 'Nam non est rectum, ut ita expellatur ille, qui in monasterio fuit nutritus ab infantia in bona vita, et eat ad peiorem, id est ad saecularem vitam, sicuti expellatur ille, qui de saeculo veniens et in bona vita ante non vixit'. *Ibid.*, c. 71, p. 637: 'Iste talis expellendus est, si iam grandis de saeculo conversus est in monasterio, quia ipse sponte venit; si autem infans ibi nutritus fuerit et quia vult ad peiorem conversationem ire, id est in seculo, non debet expelli, sed in carcerem mittendus est, donec se emendaverit, etiam usque ad mortem'.

up carefully within one's own community to be excellent material for the priesthood. In their case, he felt, the abbot could be certain that they had not committed serious – read: sexual – sins which disqualified them for this lofty office, whereas with a brother who had not been raised under strict *custodia*, a thorough investigation into his antecedents was necessary before admitting him to the *oblatio sacrificii*.<sup>62</sup> The matter of sexual sins standing in the way of priesthood was obviously a pressing affair, for much is made of the distinction between graver and lesser sins. The *graviora culpa* – amongst which sexual crimes loomed large – were to be punished by a kind of excommunication comparable to public penance, a punishment which according to canon law was manifestly incompatible with being a priest or a deacon. Hildemar therefore urged the utmost discretion before taking such a drastic measure. Priests, future and present, were apparently such an important asset that in order to preserve them for the community, he diverged in certain respects from the Rule. Theft was to be punished as a minor sin if the culprits were priests – or children who could rise to this office. The same applied in cases where (candidate) priests had dared to speak to the excommunicated.<sup>63</sup>

Hildemar was adamant that in the case of really grave sins, for which the *canones* demanded public penance and exclusion from clerical orders, this grave punishment should be meted out, 'whether someone is literate or illiterate, learned or unlearned'.<sup>64</sup> But he was walking a tightrope, wrestling with the fact that the Rule he commented upon had not taken the presence of so many deacons and priests into account. For this reason, he gave an exhaustive enumeration of extenuating circumstances, particularly with respect to the children who were yet to rise to the priesthood. If someone over fifteen years of age fornicated with a *parvulus*, the child had to be whipped; however, if the child mended his ways and did not repeat his sin, he could still become a priest. As to his

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 62, pp. 570-1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 26, pp. 355: 'Sed sciendum est, quia si ille infans talis fuerit, ut possit ad honorem presbyteratus venire, aut forte presbyter est, non debet in graviore culpa judicari, sed in minori'. Presumably Hildemar was speaking of future priests (*infantes*) as well as present ones (adults). The Latin of the *Expositio* remains very close to spoken language.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 23, p. 346: 'Si vero talis ac tanta fuerit graviora culpa, pro qua secundum canonicam auctoritatem ad ordinem clericatus non possit accedere, tunc omnis, sive literatus sive illiteratus, sive doctus, sive indoctus fuerit, qui huiusmodi culpae obnoxius est, in graviore culpa judicandus est'.

older partner, if he had sinned only once and under the influence of alcohol, his crime should be considered a minor one, and the priesthood remained open to him; if he were a priest and only sinned once, he had to do penance for two years, after which he could celebrate mass again.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, one had to be a recidivist to be disqualified as a priest. Hildemar's wide experience with monastic life had made him mild; he was familiar with the moral dangers lurking in all-male communities, but was also afraid to lose his much needed monks in orders if he judged them too harshly. Sexuality and service at the altar were incompatible; hence his solicitude was for those who would touch the sacraments, namely deacons and priests. The fear of a pollution ensuing from touching the 'terrible sacraments' in an unclean state is at the root of clerical celibacy. As Theodulf of Orléans explained to his clergy, Old Testament priests could marry because they only incidentally served at the altar; Christian priests, however, had to do so every day, and therefore had to keep themselves in a state of constant purity.<sup>66</sup> Notker Balbulus illustrated the same principle in a miracle story in which a constantly fornicating bishop was nonetheless forced to celebrate mass. The poor man approached the altar with trepidation, and rightly so, for as soon as he touched the *terribilia sacramenta*, he dropped dead.<sup>67</sup>

Along with a serious pollution, this bishop suffered from a loss of the *virtus* which had formerly enabled him to be an effective priest. How could God accept a gift from contaminated hands? Sexual continence was a prerequisite for the possession of *virtus*, a concept that did not refer so much to 'virtue' as to power; it denoted the charismatic ability to mediate between God and mankind.<sup>68</sup>

The main function of the priests was to be *mediatores inter Deum et homines*, a role which they could no longer perform if their consecrated hands had been contaminated by sexuality. Against this background,

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 25, 350-1.

<sup>66</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare II*, c. 8, 4, p. 170: 'Ipsi tamen Iudaeorum sacerdotes non habentes tam sanctum sacrificium, sicut et nos habemus, tempore vicis suae longe erant a domo sua et a coniugali opere et remoti iuxta templum in continentia castitatis excubabant donec tempus ministerii sui explerent. Nunc autem sicut semper ministrare debent, ita semper continentes esse oportet sacerdotes. Tractant enim non victimas pecudum, sed ipsum immaculatum corpus et sanguini domini'.

<sup>67</sup> Notker the Stammerer, *Gesta Karoli*, I, c. 25, pp. 33-4.

<sup>68</sup> For a fundamental treatment of these matters, see Angenendt, "Mit reinen Händen".

Carolingian monasteries served as powerhouses of prayer. To a certain extent, this also applied to nunneries; they did their part in singing psalms *pro remediae animae*, and female virginity was highly valued. But the issue of continence was even more pressing in male communities, for these had to provide priests and masses. And who could better do so than the *nutriti* who had lived in the cloister all their lives? The weight of patristic tradition with its insistence on personal behaviour not detracting from the efficacy of priesthood, and its misgivings about confusing doctrine with the miraculous was insufficient to counter the growing demand for pure mediators between God and humankind. Their education was therefore geared to one single aim: the preservation of innocence and the nurturing of ascetic *virtus*. Whereas most ordinary priests needed to take wives in order to survive life's hardships, the cloistered ones were released from such cares. To them, therefore, the faithful turned when they wanted to make sure that their gifts to God would arrive at their proper destination.

### 3. *CLAUSTRUM* VERSUS *SAECULUM*: HILDEMAR ON CHILD REARING

Preservation of innocence became the foundation for an educational strategy based on permanent supervision (*custodia*) and moderate discipline. That child oblates were brought up 'better than the sons of kings' is doubtful,<sup>69</sup> but they certainly were subjected to diligent care. Most monastic rules bear witness to this, although not in equal measure. A lack of attention to children and their needs does not necessarily imply indifference; there may simply have been too few of them to necessitate specific rulings. If one compares the Rule of Benedict with its Carolingian commentaries, it becomes quite clear that the number of children had risen dramatically. Whereas Benedict's remarks about children and their special needs were brief, Hildemar devoted extensive passages to their education. Moreover, he envisaged a special *ordo infantum* with many masters engaged in constant supervision.<sup>70</sup> Benedict, on the other hand, had felt that age should have no consequences for the community's hierarchy, 'for Samuel and Daniel judged as children over their elders'.<sup>71</sup> Whoever

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<sup>69</sup> Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings*.

<sup>70</sup> De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery'.

<sup>71</sup> *RB*, c. 63, 5-6: 'Et in omnibus omnino locus aetas non discernat ordines nec praeiudicet, quia Samuhel et Danihel pueri presbyteros iudicaverunt'.



entered the monastery first could count on a higher position in the order of monks. In all situations in which the community met in its entirety, 'age should not determine rank'. In the refectory and the oratory, therefore, child oblates might occupy a better place than adult novices who had joined the monastery after them. This befits a monastery in which the number of children was relatively low. Such a community had little need for any formal organisation of education, scholarly or otherwise. The Rule mentions no specialised masters, and the only school to which Benedict refers to is the *schola dominici servitii*, the monastery itself.<sup>72</sup> Children's mental and physical weakness he treated with characteristic discretion; here also, *ne quid nimis* was the watchword. When it came to food and drink, the *infantes* of the community were to receive special treatment, being exempt from the strictness of the rule.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, their lack of understanding made them unsuitable candidates for excommunication; rather, they should be whipped.<sup>74</sup> Still, in this 'school of the Lord's service' all monks were equally responsible for caring for their juniors. Education was a communal affair.<sup>75</sup>

Naturally, things were different in large Carolingian abbeys that might harbour as many as a hundred children. Specialised masters were now in charge of the moral and intellectual upbringing of the young monks.<sup>76</sup> Even in a fairly small community such as Hildemar's, specialisation was inevitable. He himself may have been the only schoolmaster, but when it came to daily supervision, he assigned no less than three or four masters to a group of ten children. They were to watch over them at all times;

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, prol., 45: 'Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici scola servitii'. In their commentaries on this passage, Hildemar and Smaragdus emphasised the contemplative aspects of monastic life, treating *scola* as the equivalent of *vacatio*, i.e. liberating oneself entirely from earthly cares in order to devote oneself to God's service. The same interpretation led to the famous text adorning the so-called 'external school' on the Plan of St Gall: 'domus communis scolae id est vacationis'.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 37; c. 39, 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 30, 1-3: 'Omnis aetas vel intellectus proprias debet habere mensuras. Ideoque, quotiens pueri vel adulescentiores aetate, aut qui minus intellegere possunt quanta poena sit excommunicationis, hii tales dum delinquant, aut ieiuniis nimis affligantur aut acris verbis coerceantur, ut sanentur'.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 70, 4-5: 'Infantum vero usque quindecim annorum aetates disciplinae diligentia ab omnibus et custodia sit; sed et hoc cum omni mensura et ratione'.

<sup>76</sup> About Carolingian educational 'policy' and the monasteries, see Riché, *Les écoles et l'enseignement dans l'Occident chrétien*, pp. 65-110; Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 47-71.

when the masters had to busy themselves with household duties, other monks should take over.<sup>77</sup> Hildemar repeatedly referred to the Rule's instruction that children should be supervised everywhere (*ubiubi*), reiterating this expression no less than six times and furnishing it with a detailed explanation.<sup>78</sup> Thus, his commentary provides some clues to what the daily life of child oblates must have been like. They took part in all activities of the community, but as a separate group; in the chapter and the choir, the children took up their position within the *ordo infantum*.<sup>79</sup> In the refectory, they ate standing opposite their mentors;<sup>80</sup> exceptionally well-behaved boys would receive the privilege of standing at the abbot's table, being given some of the guests' fare as a reward.<sup>81</sup> After Compline they left the oratory together, led by their masters bearing lamps, proceeding in crocodile fashion along the altars to say their prayers. After a strictly supervised visit to the latrine, the *infantes* went to their beds,

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<sup>77</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 22, pp. 331-2; here, the supervising monks are called *maiores*. In c. 63, p. 578 Hildemar stipulated that apart from the three or four *magistri*, others should be enlisted to guard the children: 'Nam ob hoc debet abbas praeter illos magistros, id est tres vel quatuor, quos iam diximus superius, specialiter consituere, qui eos jugiter et ubique usque ad tempus debeant custodire, etiam alios fratres iubere, qui illos pueros custodiant. Nam si illi opus fuerit, coquinam facere vel aliud agere, cum ipso infante potest agere'.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, p. 331-2, p. 337; c. 37, p. 418; c. 68, p. 581; c. 70, p. 621.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, p. 334; c. 68, p. 576. See also c. 68, p. 581: '... ordines suos dicit debere servare inter se, qui in custodia sunt; nam si XV annum habuerint et sua vita concordaverit aetati, tunc debet in choro stare et ordinem suum inter omnes habere. Si autem XV annos habuerit et vitam non habuerit talem, ut possit de generali custodia exire, non debet exire'. This is a comment on *RB*, c. 68, 18: 'Pueri parvi vel adulescentes in oratorio vel ad mensas cum disciplina ordines suos consequantur'. In the Rule of Benedict, the expression 'to follow one's orders' does not necessarily refer to a separate hierarchy for the children; more likely the general hierarchy is meant, in which they are to keep their own place.

<sup>80</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 38, p. 427: 'Si enim infantes sunt tanti, quantae et mensae, per unumquamque mensam debet unus infans stando manducare; verumtamen ante talem fratrem debet stare, qui eum custodiat, ne cum joco aut aliqua negligentia manducet'.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Verumtamen ille infans debet manducare ante abbatem, qui melior est et honeste manducat propter hospitem, qui cum abbate manducat, ne turpitudine sit'. See also *ibid.*, c. 37, pp. 419-20: 'Hoc notandum est, quia debet etiam abbas, si viderit iam infantem, qui religiose se continet atque bonam vitam habet, de illo sermonem dicere in capitulo, ut ille, cum hoc audieret, sciat postmodum amare sanctitatis vitam. Debet etiam illi in refectorio porrigere aliquando de cibo hospitis, ut ille sciat amare normam rectitudinis et quasi suasus isto modo in melius proficiat'.

without surveillance being relaxed for a single moment.<sup>82</sup> The aim of the operation was clearly to prevent sin at all times. From Gregory the Great, Hildemar borrowed a significant metaphor: though a city be strongly walled, it can still fall to the enemy if, through negligence, one gate should remain open.<sup>83</sup>

Hildemar's educational theory was based on monastic principles pertaining to all members of the community, be they adults or children. In most monastic rules – including those of Benedict and the Master – the adult members of the community were also carefully watched by *decani* or *circatores*.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, *custodia* and *disciplina* were overlapping concepts: mutual control was to render superfluous any exercise of discipline in the strict sense of the word. This 'medicine' was only to be administered when all preventive measures had failed. Similar principles inspired Hildemar's views on the *custodia infantum*. If the masters felt obliged to punish a child, their supervision had in fact left much to be desired. Disciplinary measures were totally pointless unless they were embedded in the all-embracing *custodia*, because only this could prevent the delinquent from lapsing into his former misconduct.<sup>85</sup>

Oblates were part and parcel of the monastic community also in other senses. The young were fully involved in the daily liturgical routine and did their share of the household chores.<sup>86</sup> Education, therefore, mostly

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, pp. 333-4: 'Post completorium [autem] signo facto debent exire de choro, et magister illorum debet accendere lucernam et ire cum illis infantibus per singula altaria oratorii, ut per unumquodque altare usquedum oraverint, unus magister in ante, alter magister vadet in medio, et tertius magister retro. Deinde ire debent ad necasseria naturae cum lumine et magister ipsorum cum illis, qui ad exitum voluerint venire. Et quia indigent illuc custodia, ideo magistri eorum semper debent cum illis esse, usquequo collocari debent. Deinde collocantur infantes, et donec illi infantes collocant se, semper assistere ibidem debent magistri, qui eos custodiant'.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, p. 332: 'Sic enim s. Gregorius dicit: Si tota civitas fuerit clausa et munita, solummodo unam foramen apertam fuerit in ea, per quod hostis intraverit, tota civitas perit, quia foramen apertum fuit, id est cuniculus, per quam hostis intravit'. See also *ibid.*, c. 36, pp. 408-9.

<sup>84</sup> Donat, 'Les coutumes monastiques autour de l'An Mil'.

<sup>85</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 37, p. 418-9: 'Magister vero infantum debet esse bonus atque religiosus et timens Deum, qui sollicitus agat et temperate erga illos. Non illos nimium flagellare aut male tractare eos debet, sed debet magnam custodiam habere super illos atque sollicitudinem, eo quod nihil valet flagellum aut excommunicatio, nisi fuerit illis custodia in omnibus, quia post flagellum vel disciplinam statim reverti solent ad negligentiam, si non viderint super se magistrum habere'.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 22, p. 334.

progressed in practice as it had done in Benedict's days. By participation and observation, children learned what it was to be a proper monk.<sup>87</sup> To a large extent, they were apprentices rather than pupils, while their masters served as role models. Nonetheless, Hildemar kept them apart more than Benedict had done. He elaborated extensively upon the Rule's brief precept that the physically weak – the children and the elderly – be treated with mildness, devoting almost all his attention to the children. They were to be given meat of quadrupeds as soon as they displayed the slightest sign of bad health, while fish, butter and milk was part of their daily diet. In this context he commented in passing that the youngest ones – the three-, four- and five-year-olds – needed the most meat, revealing that the *infantes* he had in mind could indeed be toddlers.<sup>88</sup>

But Hildemar went further than a lenient diet. All those up to the age of fifteen belonged to the *ordo infantum*, which knew its own internal hierarchy. And even above fifteen one might have to go on being treated as a 'child', for only young monks displaying suitable behaviour were allowed to take leave of the group of children.<sup>89</sup> In other words, they could do so if they had sufficiently interiorised the values of monastic life. They could only take their rightful place among the adults, however, after

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<sup>87</sup> To Hildemar, the *scola* was first and foremost the monastic community itself and its Rule; *ibid.*, prol., p. 66. Only once did he use this term in a different sense: misbehaving children were to be punished in the *scola magistri* (*ibid.*, c. 45, p. 470). This is the only reference to something like a school-room, though it is clear that the child oblates were taught singing, grammar and arithmetic; these were the topics they were supposed to discuss with a learned guest (*ibid.*, c. 37, p. 418). During the daily period of *lectio*, the children did their reading supervised by their masters (*ibid.*, c. 48, p. 483), also occupying themselves with writing practice on their wax tables (*ibid.*, p. 481). Cf. *RM*, c. 50, 12, p. 224; De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery', pp. 114-5.

<sup>88</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 37, p. 419: 'Hoc notandum est, quia juxta tempus aetatis suae debet illis tribuere carnes quadrupedum, eo quod plus indiget et opus est, cum in tertio anno est, carnes manducare, deinde in quarto minus, et in quinto plus minus; deinde usque decimum vel undecimum carnes quadrupedum minus manducare debent. In infirmitate autem vel debilitate debet illis carnes quadrupedum dare, quantum necesse est'.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 30, pp. 370-1; c. 68, p. 581; and especially c. 70, p. 621: 'Et hoc notandum est, quia illis infantibus quindecim annos habentibus dixit, qui vitam cum annis concordant: nam ceteris etiam usque viginti vel eo amplius, donec intellegunt, semper diligentiam habeant et custodiam, nec locum suum in ullo loco teneat inter alios, nisi inter illos, cum quibus in disciplinam et custodiam sunt. Nam cum exierint de disciplina, locum suum accipiant, i.e. illum, quando in monasterio intraverunt'.

a probationary period of up to one year, during which they were entrusted to a senior of impeccable conduct.<sup>90</sup> Thus, a transitional stage was created, allowing the young monk to gradually dissociate himself from the group of youngsters with whom he had until then shared his life.<sup>91</sup>

There are no signs that Hildemar demanded any kind of profession from an oblate who graduated to physical and spiritual adulthood. To the contrary: the young monk was allotted a place in the adult hierarchy according to the moment when he had been accepted into the community, i.e. corresponding to the date of his oblation.<sup>92</sup> Outside of the *ordo infantum*, age no longer affected rank; seniority did, however, along with the priestly hierarchy.<sup>93</sup> This implies that those who entered the community at an early age would rise through the ranks like meteors once they became adults. A prolonged stay in the monastery yielded a high status. This accords with Hildemar's belief in the effectiveness of custody and discipline. Those brought up with care in the community would be fit to become its elite members, in due course being elevated to the priesthood. His commentary provides a good example of adaptation of the Rule to new circumstances, while at the same time adhering faithfully to its basic principles. The *ordo infantum* as well as monastic priesthood were two of the most important adjustments to the demands of ninth-century monastic life.

Hildemar's pedagogical strategy aimed for a gradual increase of balanced self-control. Benedict's principle of 'nothing too much' pervaded

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 68, p. 582: 'Et hoc notandum: usque ad quintum decimum annum, sicut inferius dicturus est, debent illi infantes sub custodia esse, et sub omnibus, quibus injunctum est. Deinde post XV annum, si visus fuerit ille infans bonus et sobrius, ita ut non sit illi necessitas, magistros habere, debet exire ex illa disciplina, et debet illum abbas solummodo uni specialiter fratri bonae et sanctae conversationis commendare ...'.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Et ille senior debet illum sollicite custodire et videre, utrum levis sit in suo motu aut forte familiaritatem habeat cum allis infantibus, suis coaevis etiam'.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 68, p. 581: 'Quod vero dicit: *Pueri parvi vel adolescentes in oratorio vel ad mensas cum disciplina ordines consequantur*, ordines suos dicit debere servare inter se, qui in custodia sint; nam si XV annum habuerint et sua vita concordaverit aetati, tunc debet in choro stare et ordinem suum inter omnes habere'.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 60, pp. 554-5. Hildemar was well aware of the fact that the number of priests within the monastery had grown since Benedict's day; for this reason, in the hierarchy during mass they could no longer be placed directly after the abbot, as the rule prescribed. *Ibid.*, p. 555: 'Sciendum est enim, quia ubi dicit *post abbatem stare*, ideo dicit, quia tunc erant pauci sacerdotes et melioris vitae quam nunc sint ...'.

most of his recommendations. He compared God's law to a rider's bridle preventing a horse from straying too far to the left or to the right; similarly, the *lex dei* would keep a monk midway between overzealousness and indolence.<sup>94</sup> Self-regulation was to be aimed at attaining an equilibrium and avoiding any excess. Surely, control of sexual impulses was of paramount importance; surveillance in the dormitory was to be permanent. Homosexuality and nocturnal emissions of semen were treated in depth, including the penances they called for.<sup>95</sup> But for Hildemar the concept of self-control covered a much wider range of behaviour than sexuality alone. In a close-knit community, anger, rancour, pride, outrage and jealousy could be just as disruptive.<sup>96</sup> Hildemar viewed such emotions, anger in particular, as symptoms of mental illness. Anger was capable of destroying a person, as sudden fire would devour a pile of straw; in fact, it was the monk's worst enemy.<sup>97</sup> True humility meant conquering one's anger, along with other strong emotions. Nothing was good that was 'too much': monks could laugh and speak, but uncontrolled merriment and loud talk did not befit them, and neither did undue sadness.<sup>98</sup> Time and again, he contrasted proper monastic behaviour with that in the world outside, clearly implying that the laity had a very

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<sup>94</sup> This text only occurs in the so-called Basilius-version of Hildemar's commentary. Cf. Hafner (ed.), *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 122: 'Ergo valde necessarium est frenum, ut nec nimis sit quis tristis, nec nimis laetus. Et pulchre frenum legis dei necessarium est homini, quia sicuti equus freno regitur sessoris, ut nec ad dexteram aut ad sinistram plus quam oportet ambulet, ita et homo in via dei, freno legis dei regitur, ut nec minus aut plus quam oportet faciens in aliquem errorem labatur'.

<sup>95</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 22, pp. 332-3; c. 62, p. 569.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1, p. 73: 'Vitiae animae sunt, veluit ira, superbia, invidia et caetera his similia, quae per animum perpetrantur'. *Ibid.*, c. 2, p. 93: 'Et hoc animadvertendum est, quia iste morbus, id est infirmitas, ex infirmitate animae procedit, quia sicut corpus habet infirmitates suas, id est febrem et caetera his similia, ita habet anima suas infirmitates, id est iram, furorem, indignationem et caetera his similia ...'.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 70, p. 621-2: 'Sicut enim stipula depascitur ab igne, ita et homo depascitur ab ira, cum ab ea superatur, et ex hoc ultra mensuram agit tabescens ira'.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 7, p. 261: 'Quod dicit: stultus in risu exultat vocem suam, id est ridendo exultat vocem, sicuti laici faciunt, qui granditer rident, hoc est cachinnant; sciendum est enim, quia sunt multi, qui, quamquam in voce non expriment sonum in risu, tamen, si in corde superfluum laetitiam habuerint, apud Deum magnus risus est'. The commentator did reckon, however, with the monks being moved to tears by their *lectio*; hence, he advised them not to sit too near to each other, lest their sobbing should disturb the others (*ibid.*, c. 48, p. 483: '... nam si insimul legerint, non possunt contemperationem vel lacrimas habere').

different code of behaviour. The visiting mighty were easily aroused to anger, especially where their honour was concerned. Monks should therefore tread carefully, lest they upset them and created a scandal.<sup>99</sup> Lay guests could be heard laughing and talking loudly in the guest's quarters, which for this reason had to be built as far away from the church as possible; there, they devoted themselves to 'friendship', which Hildemar referred to as *humanitas, quod vulgo dicitur minaida*.<sup>100</sup> This lay aristocratic conviviality he distinguished carefully from the *caritas* befitting the monks. The latter belonged to the cloister, and they should show this in their external behaviour. Monks should display 'continence of body' (*continentia corporis*), displaying their humility by going about with a bowed head.<sup>101</sup> If tasks such as the pruning of high vines made this temporarily impossible, a monk should remain mentally *incurvatus* all the same.<sup>102</sup> In other words, those living within the *claustrum* had a code of behaviour diametrically opposed to that which prevailed in the outside world. Monastic deportment was ruled by self-control and display of humility, while the laity – at least in the eyes of the monks – were characterised by loudness, unbounded anger or joy and an easily offended sense of honour.

In an age in which monasteries served as political, economic and cultural centres, the outside world threatened to engulf the inner sanctuary of the monks. They had supposedly fled from the world, but the hustle and bustle of lay people – guests, pilgrims, artisans, farmers – unavoidably entered the monastic confines. Above all, there were the aristocrats who made constant demands on monastic hospitality. Hildemar wanted young monks to be properly trained in aristocratic etiquette. Under the watchful eye of the abbot boys had to practise 'answering the mighty', being neither too shy nor too jolly, and looking the guest steadily in the

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 34, p. 465-6; c. 51, pp. 497; Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 148. See also De Jong, 'Power and humility', pp. 37-8.

<sup>100</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 53, p. 504. See also *ibid.*, c. 57, p. 611: '... dormitorium, ubi monachi suscipi debent, habetur separatim a laicorum cubiculo, i.e. ubi laici jacent, eo quod laici possunt stare usque mediam noctem et loqui et joculari, et monachi non debent, sed magis silentium habere et orare'.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 7, p. 264: '... sed per continentiam corporis, quantum ad hominem attinet, interiora solet cognoscere'. Cf. *RB*, cc. 7, 63 and 66.

<sup>102</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 7, p. 268: 'Et hoc animadvertendum est, quia monachus, si talem habeat necessitatem, in qua non possit caput inclinare, sicuti et vitem putare et laborare, in qua necessitas est caput erigere, si caput erigit, tamen mente caput inclinatum debet habere'.

face. Afterwards the abbot had to go over the conversation carefully, pointing out any mistakes.<sup>103</sup> It is obvious why he was the one to teach the young monks aristocratic manners, for the abbot – in most cases an aristocrat himself – served as the link between his community and the outside world.<sup>104</sup>

One way of warding off the ever-present *saeculum* was the creation of the *claustrum*, an enclosed space within the monastery, only accessible to members of the community proper. Another, equally effective strategy was to demand from the inhabitants of the cloister a standard of behaviour very different from the one prevailing in the outside world. Such 'monastic' conduct should be clearly and manifestly expressed. Hence the insistence on the way monks should talk and walk: they were to bow their heads and refrain from any excessive gestures or expressions of emotion, while the exactly opposite comportment was expected of the aristocratic laity. Moreover, they had no sense of moderation, drinking their wine in one gulp.<sup>105</sup> Their monastic hosts would be careful not to offend them, at best being discreetly amused by the excessive conduct of their guests, but they did not morally condemn it or expect any different from them. Such were the ways of the world.

Clearly, these opposite codes of behaviour made the transition from one world to the other none too easy. Understandably, Hildemar and his contemporaries had their doubts about accepting adult novices from the ranks of the warrior caste, insisting on the deposition of arms as the most

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 37, pp. 418: 'Deinde cum venerint hospites sapientes in monasterio, debet abbas unum vocare ex illis [infantibus] et probare isto modo: Vade et loquere cum hospite de cantu aut de compoto vel de grammatica seu etiam de aliqua arte rationabiliter atque honestissime. Postea vero debet ipse prior quasi non videns diligenter attendere et videre, utrum honeste aut verecunde locutus fuerit cum hospite, et qualiter aspicit in conspectu hospitis, ne passim aspiciat, sed solummodo hospitem. Post discussum vero hospitis debet illum prior admonere, ubi negligenter interrogavit vel respondit aut negligenter aut nimis timide vel cum laetitia locutus est, ut possit postmodum ad potentes reddere responsum'.

<sup>104</sup> De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism'.

<sup>105</sup> See Ekkehard's story about the *confratres* of St Gall dining in the refectory on Easter Sunday. Amongst them was one Bernhard, who behaved as he would have done at home, making loud jokes and drinking his wine in one gulp. *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 136, p. 264.



meaningful aspect of the profession ritual.<sup>106</sup> In fact, Hildemar wanted to make absolutely sure that those entering his community would never again take up their arms, preferring adult recruits who had already received clerical tonsure.<sup>107</sup> They might then decide not to stay in the monastery after all, remaining secular clerics, but at least their intention to refrain from fighting was manifest. When all was said and done, however, aristocratic converts in their prime of life still represented a liability. They had not been brought up under proper custody, and thus lacked the long training of the *nutriti*. No doubt the 'eradication of vices and the implantation of virtues' – Hildemar's definition of *conversio morum*<sup>108</sup> – was a lengthy affair, as was the gradual adaptation to the monastic code of self-restraint and moderation. This was more easily achieved with young oblates, whose behaviour could be trained and refined over a number of years. Thus, they could become the embodiment of the separateness of the cloister, for their cultivated comportment would be certain to distance the inner world from the outer one. No wonder, then, that Hildemar refused to ever banish those who grew up in the community. How would they maintain themselves in that other life they had never known, never having acquired the skills enabling them to do so?

For various reasons, then, child oblates were preferred to adult novices. Their literate training as well as their purity made them important assets,

<sup>106</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 58, p. 535-6. After having spent two months in the hospice, the newcomer had to publicly lay down his arms in the chapter; after having done so, he then received tonsure and clerical garb, and was taken to the *cella novitiorum*. Even if he decided not to make his profession after ten months, he was to remain a cleric forever. In this respect, Hildemar followed the customs of his monastery of origin, Corbie. In 816, Adalhard of Corbie and Benedict of Aniane crossed swords over this matter. The so-called Basilius-version of Hildemar's commentary explicitly refers to the *contentio* between Adalhard and Benedict: Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 140. See also Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', pp. 45, 81.

<sup>107</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 58, p. 540: 'Nam iste laicus talem intentionem debet habere, postquam ad monasteriam vult venire, ut nunquam postea portet arma. Ideo melius est, ut tonsus veniat, quam apud Deum arma deponat, excepto, si non talis est laicus, ut ea intentione veniat, ut non deponat arma, nisi ante probaverit se'. In Hildemar's commentary, clerics are assigned duties outside the *claustrum*, such as serving in the abbot's kitchen (*ibid.*, c. 53, pp. 506-7). Some of these *clerici* may have been prospective monks, or clerics who had decided not to make their profession.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 58, p. 541: 'Conversio morum est eradicatio vitiorum et plantatio virtutum'.

especially in a society which highly prized virginity in its religious mediators. This made male child oblates the best candidates for the priesthood. Moreover, their long education under *custodia* aimed at a gradual interiorisation of the claustral 'techniques du corps'. If this educational tactic succeeded, it could shape people personifying and guaranteeing the cloister's detachment from the ever-pervasive *saeculum*, 'acting as if naturally, out of habit', as Hildemar said.<sup>109</sup> The rearing of child oblates was part of a monastic strategy of separation. Hence, stories were told of high-born guests vainly attempting to distract the child-monks' attention from prayer, praising the fact that the children remained entirely unmoved.<sup>110</sup>

This discourse of distance should not tempt us into believing that such isolation was easily ensured, however. Precisely the proximity of the outside world necessitated a radically different monastic behavioural code, which evolved in dialectical confrontation with that of the aristocratic laity. Serving the needs of the world as mediators while maintaining ascetic integrity – these were the two tasks between which monastic life attempted to preserve a delicate balance. Accepting child oblates into the monastery long remained one of the most important means for achieving stability, obedience and a true conversion of behaviour.

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 7, p. 269: 'Omnia, quae antea, i.e. ante perfectum amorem castum, non poterat ille monachus sine timore gehennae vel laboris custodire, postea quasi naturaliter, h.e. tanquam per naturam ex consuetudine custodiet'.

<sup>110</sup> According to Ekkehard, such testing of monastic discipline was an important aspect of the visits of Conrad I and Otto I to St Gall. *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 14, p. 40: 'Quibus poma in medio ecclesiae pavimento antesterni iubens, cum nec unum parvissimorum moveri nec ad ea adtendere vidisset, miratus est disciplinam' (about Conrad I). *Ibid.*, c. 144, p. 282: 'Oculisque grandibus in fratres hinc inde versatis, quam antea noverat, si adhuc sit, disciplinam probans, baculum sibi decidere sivit' (about Otto I).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MODELS AND RITUALS OF CHILD OBLATION

#### 1. BIBLICAL MODELS

The most elaborate and coherent account of biblical models for child oblation is Hrabanus Maurus' *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, written in 829 to curtail Gottschalk's bid for freedom.<sup>1</sup> To the abbot of Fulda, monasticism in general and child oblation in particular belonged to the sphere of divine law. This was the main thrust of his argument when he attacked Gottschalk and his supporters: they had overturned the order of things, putting *lex humana* above *lex divina*.<sup>2</sup> Hrabanus' catalogue of texts supporting child oblation is heavily biased towards the Old Testament. Only two of his biblical *exempla* are taken from the Gospels: the story of Jesus' presentation in the temple (Lc 2, 22-24) and Christ's command that the little children be allowed to come to Him (Lc 18, 16-17).<sup>3</sup> The majority of his authoritative texts came straight from the Old Testament and can be divided into three groups: the offering of the firstborn, the readiness to sacrifice shown by Abraham and Jephta, and – standing on its own – the story of Hannah and Samuel.

The offering of the firstborn is an important theme in the Pentateuch. It first appears in the story of Abel's making a sacrifice that was acceptable to God, in the shape of the firstborn of his sheep (Gn 4, 3-4). According to the book of Exodus, the obligation to offer one's firstborn pertained not only to beasts but also to humankind: 'The Lord spake unto Moses saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast: it is mine' (Ex 13, 1-2). Hrabanus quoted both passages in full, followed by the text about the ordination of the Levites, who had been set aside by God as substitutes for all the firstborn of the children of Israel (Nm 8, 5-22).<sup>4</sup> The theme of the firstborn was crucial to Hrabanus' argument, for it suggested

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<sup>1</sup> See above, chapter II, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 434.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 429.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 421-2.

that acceptable offerings could be human as well as animal or material: men should not only offer up their possessions, but also themselves. Furthermore, the Levites furnished him with a suitable analogy to child oblation. Destined like oblates for the priesthood, the Levites represented a living *oblato domini*. As he pointed out, if the children of Israel were permitted to offer their adult brothers the Levites to God, depriving them of earthly possessions, who then would dare to deny a father's right to do the same with his own underage son?<sup>5</sup>

The models of Abraham and Jephta were of a more problematic nature, for here actual human sacrifice was at stake. Having been ordered to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering (*holocaustum*), Abraham was only relieved of that terrible duty after having shown his readiness to obey God's command (Gn 22, 1-8). Jephta was not similarly reprieved when he achieved victory over the Ammonites in exchange for the sacrifice of the first living being to greet his return home. He was held to his promise, even when it became clear that the sacrifice would be his only daughter (Idc 11, 30-39). The story underlines the terrible but irrevocable consequences of a vow to God. In this sense, Jephta's behaviour could indeed serve as a model for child oblation, highlighting the readiness of parents *and* children to uphold vows once pronounced. Ambrose had already referred to the story when encouraging virgins to honour the vows taken for them by their parents. While praising Jephta's daughter for her ready acceptance of her fate, he nonetheless thought she had been compelled by a 'miserable necessity' (*miserabilis necessitas*).<sup>6</sup> Hrabanus, on the other hand, was at considerable pains to distinguish such brutal human sacrifice from the offering of children in his own day. Whereas the Old Testament holocaust had been performed by the sword (*per ferrum*), child oblation was a matter of the spirit, he contended; thanks to the Gospel, service of

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 424-5: 'Utrum tunc videtur maiorem potestatem habere filios Israel in fratribus suis Levitis offerendis, quibus post oblationem decreto Domini abnegata est sors omnis haereditatis terrenae, et possessio inter caeteris tribus haberi: vel patrem cum filio proprio adhuc quidem tenerae aetatis, et nondum secundum legis sui iuris aut potestatis existentem, cum eum secundum sanctae Regulae instituta omnis mundanis curis negotiisque, atque possessionibus exutum, soli Deo ad serviendum mancipare decreverit? Aliud est enim ab aequali aequalem tradi, et aliud a maiore minorem alicui subiiciat'.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, c. 12, col. 177: 'Non possum accusare virum qui necesse habuit implere quod voverat; sed tamen miserabilis necessitas, quae solvitur parricidio'. See also idem, *Exhortatio virginitatis*, c. 8, cols. 366-8.

God had come to replace sacrifices such as those required of Abraham and Jephta. Hrabanus' opposition between the two forms of sacrifice was obviously inspired by the distinction between the 'literal' and the 'spiritual' levels of exegesis.<sup>7</sup> The parents' actual offering was the *servitium dei* their child performed, one which God ultimately preferred to sacrificial victims: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams' (1 Sm 15, 22). While quoting this '*auscultare magis quam offerre*' Hrabanus must have had the opening words of the Rule of Benedict – *ausculta fili* – at the forefront of his mind.<sup>8</sup>

The stories of Abraham and Jephta, therefore, were of limited value for the embattled abbot of Fulda, for they forced him to draw a clear distinction between old law and present-day practice. Sacrifice of children may have been appropriate in the days of old, he reasoned, but in the church of Christ the only acceptable offering would be a *hostia viva*. At the same time, he managed to turn even the examples of Abraham and Jephta to his advantage, arguing that if God had permitted the *patres illius temporis* to sacrifice their children in a bloody manner, he would certainly welcome the spiritual consecration of live children.<sup>9</sup> With some relief, however, Hrabanus turned to his crown witness. Samuel was not a holocaust but a living sacrifice, who as a very small boy (*infantulus*) had been offered by his mother to Eli the priest in order to serve God throughout his life. Hrabanus triumphantly produced the full account as the ultimate weapon against his opponents, showing how the offering of Samuel followed virtually the same pattern as the handing over of children according to Benedict's Rule:

... just as the Rule instructs parents to offer their small children to God together with the offerings and the *petitio* at the altar, so too did this holy woman and prophetess give her child to God, in the presence of Eli the

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<sup>7</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 426. Another theologian who worried about the aspect of human sacrifice in the Old Testament was Augustine; see *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, c. 49, 1-9, pp. 358-63.

<sup>8</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 438.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 426: 'Si enim patribus illius temporis licuit per ferrum filium aut filiam Deo offerre, cur non modo licuit istius aevi hominibus sobolem suam Deo spiritualiter consecrare, et exhibere hostiam vivam, sanctam, Deo placentem, rationabiliter in obsequium Christi? Si autem Abrahae oblatio placuit Deo, et Jephte factum meritum sanctitatis illi acquisivit, cur non multo magis spiritualis oblatio per evangelicam doctrinam instituta Deo placere credenda est?'

priest in the tabernacle, together with an offering of flour and other goods which are mentioned in the book of Kings.<sup>10</sup>

But even in his handling of this eminently suitable story there is an apologetic subcurrent, revealing the arguments of his opponents: Hannah had been a woman acting of her own accord, without consulting her husband. As I have suggested earlier, the possibility of Gottschalk having been offered by his mother may have been the background to the defensive overtones of this part of the *Liber de oblatione puerorum*.<sup>11</sup> Hrabanus forestalled his critics with a barrage of rhetorical questions. Would God have accorded Hannah the gift of prophecy if her oblation had displeased him? Would he then have allowed Samuel to prophesy about the coming of Christ and about the transformation of the old law and priesthood into a new *lex* and *sacerdotium*? And, moreover, was secular law to dominate the divine cult to the extent that nobody could transgress the *lex mundana* in order to serve Christ?<sup>12</sup> Here Hrabanus returned to his basic tenet, arguing that the divine law should always supersede its human counterpart.<sup>13</sup> While his opponents had apparently been trying to apply secular legal standards to Hannah's story, thus taking the edge off biblical precept, Hrabanus reasoned from the opposite position.

Hrabanus again emphasised the legal nature of biblical models in his treatment of Christ's presentation in the temple. Following the law of the firstborn, Jesus' parents had taken him to the temple at the occasion of Mary's purification, offering the obligatory two doves and thus consecrating their firstborn to God. Hrabanus made the most of this, stating

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 427-8: 'Vellem scire, osores isti et contradictores oblationis regularis, quid de hac oblatione dicerent, quae pene consimilis est regulari oblationi, quam beatus Pater Benedictus in sua Regula consuit: quia sicut ibi iubet parentes filios infantulos cum oblatione et petitione Deo iuxta altare offerre, ita hic et haec mulier sancta atque prophetissa filium suum infantulum cum oblatione farinae et caeteris speciebus quae in libro Regum commemorantur, coram Heli sacerdote in tabernaculo Domino sollemniter offerebat'.

<sup>11</sup> See above, chapter II, § 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 427.

<sup>13</sup> On the Levites, for example, he took a deliberately legalistic stance, referring to tithes as well as child oblates. *Ibid.*, col. 424: 'Ecce Dominus expetit omne primogenitum ab his qui legibus suis obtemperare debent, et non tantum hominum, sed etiam primogenita iumentorum ut ostendat quod non solum nostra set etiam nosmetipsos debitores sumus illi offerre'.

that the 'giver of law' had been offered 'according to law' and *cum oblatione*:

If Jesus wished to be brought to the temple by this parents, allowing a sacrifice to be made on his account to God, who is it that dares to condemn the oblation of parents concerning their own children, forbidding them to present their live offering (*hostia vivens*) to God?<sup>14</sup>

The comparison falls somewhat flat, of course, for Luke's Gospel relates an offering *for* Christ, not *of* Christ. Nonetheless, by some deft manoeuvring with the word *oblatio* and the law of the firstborn, Hrabanus succeeded in putting the story of Jesus' presentation on a par with Samuel's oblation. A similar play on the expression *offerre* can be observed in the only other example from the Gospels he managed to come up with, that of Christ saying, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God' (Lc 18, 16). Although the biblical texts use the verb *offerre* when speaking of parents bringing their children to Christ to be touched, Hrabanus resolutely substituted this word by *offerre*, referring to the parents as the *offerentes*. Moreover, by combining Luke's text with Mark's about Christ taking the children into his arms, putting his hands onto them and blessing them, he once more invoked the oblation ritual, which after all involved a benediction of the child.<sup>15</sup>

Having added patristic examples of child oblation to his biblical ones, including Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict, Hrabanus attempted to show once more why 'human' (read: Saxon) law should not be allowed to interfere with biblical precept, and why vows once made to God were irrevocable. Drawing upon Jerome's refutation of Vigilantius, Hrabanus' treatise culminates in a vindication of monasticism itself as a divine institution. Was he only attributing Vigilantius' anti-monastic views to his opponents for the sake of argument, or had they really contended that too great a devotion to virginity would mean the eventual extinction of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 428: 'Si enim Jesus a parentibus ad templum deferri voluit, ibique offerri pro se hostiam Deo, quis est qui parentum oblationem in filiis suis reprehendere praesumat, et prohibere quod non exhibeant eos hostiam viventem Deo?'

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 429: 'Offerebant Jesu parvulos, ut tangeret eos: discipuli autem comminabantur offerentibus, quos, cum vidisset, indigne tulit, et ait illis: "Sinite parvulos venire ad me, et nolite prohibere eos: talium est regnum coelorum. Amen dico vobis, qui non receperit regnum Dei sicut puer, non intrabit in illud. Et complexans illos, et imponens manus super eos, benedicebat eos"'.

human race? It is hard to say. 'Tongues of vipers' apparently had whispered that if all withdrew from the world, there would be nobody left to celebrate mass, to convert the laity and to bring sinners onto the right path.<sup>16</sup> This may have been a reference to Gottschalk's actual argumentation; judging by his later career, his endeavour to leave Fulda was largely inspired by his desire to work as a priest in the world outside. Whatever the case, Hrabanus reminded him and his supporters of the essential role of monks as mediators between God and mankind, and above all, of child oblation being the mainstay of monastic life. Whoever attacked this practice was guilty of an assault upon the divine institution of monasticism itself.

Hrabanus' argument is exceptional in its coherence and extensiveness. No other early medieval source presents such elaborate reflection upon the biblical models of child oblation, for nobody had to defend it as Hrabanus did. All the same, his treatise was rooted in a long-established tradition. From patristic times onwards Hannah and Samuel had represented the most dominant biblical theme in accounts of parents donating their children to God. Jerome compared Laeta offering her daughter Paula to Hannah, affirming the right of a mother to vow her child to God;<sup>17</sup> likewise, in his eulogy of virginity Ambrose praised Samuel as a *votivus*, who had not been born for himself but for God.<sup>18</sup> Benedict did not mention Samuel in the context of child oblation, but he did refer to him when stating that age should never determine the hierarchy of the community. After all, Samuel and Daniel as *pueri* had judged older men.<sup>19</sup> One of the most valuable documents for the history of monasticism in the fifth- and sixth-century West, the *Vita Patrum Iurensium*, relates how the third abbot of the Jura monasteries, Eugendus, had been

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 438: 'Nec astu tuo ac studio monachi deterrendi sunt, arte linguae viperarum et morsu saevissimo; de quibus argumentaris et dicis: Si omnes se recluserint, et fuerint in solitudine, quis celebrabit ecclesias, quis saeculares homines lucrifaciet, quis peccatores ad virtutes poterit coartare?'

<sup>17</sup> Jerome, *Epistolae*, II, no. 107, cc. 3 and 6, pp. 293 and 298.

<sup>18</sup> Ambrose, *Exhortatio virginitatis*, c. 8, col. 367: 'Non parentibus, non tibi, sed Deo natus es ...'.

<sup>19</sup> *RB*, c. 63, 5-6: 'Et omnibus omnino locis non discernat ordines nec praeiudicet, quia Samuhel et Danihel pueri presbyteros iudicaverunt'.



offered to his predecessor Romanus following the biblical model of Samuel.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes such references are more oblique, but they still reveal Samuel as the archetype of the priest or bishop who had entered clerical life at an early stage: when Bede wrote to Archbishop Egbert of York, exhorting him to visit his diocese diligently, he reminded this former child oblate of the justice and innocence of his predecessor Samuel.<sup>21</sup> Another implicit allusion is the topos of the child being brought to the monastery right after being weaned (*statim ablactatus*); Alcuin used it in his Life of Willibrord, calling to mind the expression *postquam ablactaverit* in 1 Sam 1, 24.<sup>22</sup>

As the writings of Jerome and Ambrose show, the image of Samuel could be evoked with regard to girls as it was to boys. An interesting example of a female Samuel is offered by the Life of Lioba (d. 782), Boniface's kinswoman who followed him to the continent and became abbess of Tauberbischofsheim. When Hrabanus' pupil Rudolf of Fulda wrote her *vita* in 836, he strongly emphasised both her affinity with Samuel and her staunch adherence to her parents' irrevocable vows.<sup>23</sup> Given that Hrabanus himself commissioned this Life only seven years after the fierce conflict with Gottschalk, Rudolf's insistence on Lioba being like Samuel was probably partly inspired by the wish to take a stance on a matter still exercising many minds in Fulda. By this time, Samuel had become the official model for child oblation, with authorities closely connected to the Aachen reform movement such as Benedict of Aniane and Smaragdus of St Mihiel reiterating the following maxim:

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<sup>20</sup> *Vita patrum Iurensium*, c. 125, pp. 372-4: 'Mox igitur eum litterarum instituit elementis et, anni exacto circulo, tamquam Samuhel quondam, non in typico excurbaturus templo, sed ipse potius Christi efficiendus templum, sancto Romano oblatas est patri'. Cf. 1 Sam. 3,3: 'Samuel dormiebat in templo Domino ubi erat arca Dei'. The lives of the 'Jura fathers' were written in the second decade of the sixth century for two ascetics who had established themselves at Agaune; see Wood, 'A prelude to Columbanus'.

<sup>21</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, c. 7, p. 411.

<sup>22</sup> Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, c. 4, p. 118-9.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, c. 6, p. 124, l. 37-8: 'Et sicut Anna Samuel omnibus diebus suis in templo Dei servitutum obtulit, ita hanc ab infantia sacris litteris eruditam in sancta virginitate quamdiu vixerit illi servire concedas.' Rudolf's image of Lioba's oblation also draws upon the model of Abraham and Sarah, for Lioba was born to a mother who was supposedly past the age of child-bearing. About this interesting text, see Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 271-300.

Whoever has been brought to the monastery by his own parents should know that he must remain there forever. For when Samuel had been born and weaned Hannah offered him as a gift in God's honour, according to the vow she had made; he persisted in the service of the temple for which his mother had destined him, and he completed his service in the place to which he had been vowed.<sup>24</sup>

Closely related to the prime model of Hannah and Samuel, the theme of the firstborn did continue to play a role in early medieval reflection on child oblation. Thus, Hucbald of St Amand wrote of Rictrudis that she offered her three daughters to God 'as firstborn from the soil, that is, from her womb';<sup>25</sup> in a similar vein, an episcopal sermon described the two sons destined by Charles the Bald and Ermintrude for monastic life as their *fructum ventris*.<sup>26</sup> The key expression was *reddere fructum*, to 'return' the fruit of their union; like all parents, the king and his spouse were expected to return part of the children granted to them as an offering to God. In this sense, the model of the firstborn highlights yet another aspect of the theology of child oblation. The topos of the 'return of the fruit' underscores the notion of a deity who, as a provider of all wealth, will only continue to do so as long as the recipients relinquish as a sacrifice part of what has been given.

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict of Aniane, *Concordia regularum*, c. 66, cols. 1301-14: 'Quicumque a parentibus propriis in monasterio fuerit delegatus, noverit se ibi perpetuo perman-surum. Nam Anna Samuel puerum natum et ablactatum Deo pietate, qua voverat, obtulit; quique in ministerio templi, quo a matre fuerat functus, permansit, et ubi constitutus est, deservivit'. See also Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 2, p. 300. Both Benedict and Smaragdus used the interpolated version of Isidore's rule for monks. It is not clear when and where this interpolation was added. It was incorporated in the book of penance ascribed to Egbert of York and therefore most likely originated before the end of the eighth century; the oldest manuscripts of this so-called *Paenitentiale Ps.-Egberti* containing the interpolation (Vaticana Palat. lat. 554 and Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 2223) date from the late eighth or early ninth century. Cf. Haggenmüller, *Die Überlieferung der Beda und Egbert zugeschriebenen Bussbücher*, pp. 147-8. With thanks to Rob Meens, always a rich source of information in *rebus paenitentialibus* and otherwise.

<sup>25</sup> Hucbald of St Amand, *Vita Rictrudis*, c. 11, p. 944.

<sup>26</sup> *Coronatio Hermintrudis reginae*, MGH Capit., II, no. 301, pp. 453: 'Et isti nostro seniori Deus filios, sicut vobis notum est, dedit, in quorum nobilitate ad sanctam ecclesiam et regnum, quod Deus illi ad regendum commisit, fideles illius spem maximam se habere sunt gratulati. De quibus ipse aliquos Deo obtulit, ut etiam de fructu ventris sui oblationem Deo offeret ...'.

2. *VOTUM*

In Hannah's story the notion of reciprocity and *do-ut-des* plays a prominent role, for it is the tale of a *votum*: if God were to grant her a child, she in turn would consecrate her firstborn to service in the temple. The conditional nature of such vows was one of the features of contemporary religion criticised in the Sermon of the Mount as one aspect of the formalism of certain Jewish sects.<sup>27</sup> But in Roman society, where Christianity took root, vows were part and parcel of religious life.<sup>28</sup> Understandably, the notions of vows and gift-giving were closely connected, for vows offered the deity a conditional prospect of gifts; hence, Prudentius could speak of Christians offering their progeny in terms of *offerre votis pignera*,<sup>29</sup> while the *Regula Magistri* equated the verbs *devoveri* and *offerre*.<sup>30</sup> The sixth-century Life of Amatus provides a beautiful example of the intricate connection between vow and gift, describing the saint's oblation as an act of 'devotion', and the child itself as a gift acceptable to God:

... Cum ergo esset [Amatus' father] vir devotissimus, filium Amatum ut monasticis traderet excubiis devovit, atque beati Mauricii liminibus mancipandus adolescens tamquam munus Deo acceptabile offertur ...<sup>31</sup>

To a large extent, the religious vow itself was a gift, since monks and nuns handed over themselves to God; from the moment of their profession, they could no longer control their own destiny.<sup>32</sup> Of course, profession was not a conditional vow in the sense that an immediate favour was expected from God or a saint. On the contrary, anyone taking

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<sup>27</sup> Mt 5, 34-7. Cf. Kötting, 'Gelübde', col. 1082; Frank, 'Gelübde', pp. 306-7. Augustine considered self-sacrifice as the only true and worthy sacrifice to God; see *De civitate Dei*, X, c. 6, pp. 278-9.

<sup>28</sup> Kötting, 'Gelübde', pp. 1073-80; Eisenhut, 'Votum', col. 964-71; see also Séjourné, 'Voeu'. Vows created a 'circle of gifts and counter-gifts'; cf. Burkert, 'Glaube und Verhalten', p. 133: 'Der Kreis von Gabe und Gegengabe gestattet es, eine Wenn-Dann-Beziehung zu entwerfen; dies geschieht vor allem in der unabsehbar weit verbreiteten Methode des Gelübdes ...'.

<sup>29</sup> Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, II, v. 521-4, col. 330.

<sup>30</sup> *RM*, c. 91, 6, p. 398: '... ut ab ipse potius videatur devoveri vel offerri ...'.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita Amati*, c. 2, p. 216.

<sup>32</sup> Wollasch, 'Das Mönchsgelübde als Opfer'.

voluntary religious vows offered himself in the sure confidence 'that he will receive the crown of his good works on the Day of Judgement'.<sup>33</sup> There is no question here of gift and immediate counter-gift; when it comes to child oblation, however, matters could be different. In his story of the oblation of Donatus of Besançon, Jonas of Bobbio did not mention Samuel, but his implicit reference to the biblical model is unmistakable. Being childless like Hannah, the Burgundian *dux* Wandelenus and his wife Flavia went in despair to Columbanus to seek his intercession. The saint agreed, provided they were prepared to vow their firstborn to God; additionally, they were to promise that Columbanus would be the child's godfather. Only if these conditions were met, the couple would be blessed with abundant offspring. And indeed, Flavia conceived immediately after arriving home; at the baptismal font, Columbanus gave her son the significant name of Donatus, a reminder of the parents' obligation to have him brought up in Luxeuil.<sup>34</sup> In this tale, the models of Samuel and the firstborn are deftly interwoven, while Columbanus is cast in the role of Eli the priest. As befits a saint, Columbanus was the more powerful of the two parties in the *pacti foedus* he made with the aristocratic couple. Unquestionably, the parents could never have independently manipulated God into granting them fertility; this would offend clerical notions of God's omnipotence. Rather, the saint is presented as a *vir Dei*, and therefore as the powerful partner in something resembling a contract. Thus Jonas noted: '... the man of God promised them that he would have many gifts in readiness for them as long as they would not dare to break the terms of the agreement'.<sup>35</sup> Although the parents' vow was directed towards God, their first obligation was to Columbanus, who was implacable in his rights to the infant.

In the Life of Willibald of Eichstätt (d. 767) the mediating role of a saint is entirely absent, presenting a very different picture. This is a particularly valuable text, for its author – Willibald's relative Hugeburc of Heidenheim – drew upon information dictated to her by the saint himself.<sup>36</sup> The setting of her story was England, Willibald's and Hugeburc's native country. Here, as a three-year-old the saint fell so

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<sup>33</sup> *RM*, c. 89, 2, p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, I, c. 14, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Spondet vir Dei muneribus plenus se in promptum habere tantum ne pacti foedus studeant violare'.

<sup>36</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 36-9.

violently ill that his parents feared for his life. Worrying about the fate of their heir, the parents took him to a cross erected in the open, for – as Hugeburc explained to her continental audience – it was customary for aristocratic Anglo-Saxon families to have crosses placed on their lands for use of daily prayer. Having laid their child by the cross, the parents vowed that should young Willibald be cured they would immediately have him tonsured and dedicated to monastic life. Once their promises (*vota*) had been made, the favour requested was granted, and Willibald was restored to health.<sup>37</sup> When he reached the age of five, his parents fulfilled their promise; having consulted their relatives, they approached an intermediary, Theodred, to whom they entrusted the act of oblation. Theodred took the child to Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire, handing him over to Abbot Egwald – who only accepted the gift after having sought the permission of his monks.<sup>38</sup>

The story has several intriguing features, which obviously do not belong to the repertoire of hagiographical stereotype. The parents' consultation with the kinsmen prior to taking the child to a monastery also figures in Bede's account of his oblation; the erection of crosses in the open air – apparently accepted in England – was one of the practices for which a council in Rome in 745 condemned the heretic Aldebert, active in the region of Soissons.<sup>39</sup> The intermediary Theodred (described as *venerandus* and *fidelissimus*) may have been a cleric; there are other examples of oblation where the parents requested the aid of a clerical go-

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<sup>37</sup> Hugeburc of Heidenheim, *Vita Willibaldi*, cc. 1-2, pp. 88-9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2, p. 89: 'Confestim illum venerando fidelissimoque viro Theodredo commendabant, sua providentia eum ad cenobia ducere omniaque prudenter de sua causa dispensare disponereque rogabant. Cumque perrexerunt et illum ducebant ad monasterium quae vocatur Waldheim venerandoque abbati illius monasterii qui vocatur Egwald offerebant, ast illum sui condicionis iure iuniorem seu oboediendo discipulum suo subdiderunt imperio. Statimque illi abbas monasterii secundum regularis vitae disciplina sua claruerat ista congregatione, sicque, ut cum eorum consilio sive licentia hoc foret, ille flagitabat. Cui protinus omnis illa conventio fratrum simul responsum seu licentiam suaeque voluntatis arbitrio omnia fore fas dicebant acceptumque illum oceo inter cenobiale vitae eorum consortio iungendo sociabat'. See above, chapter I, § 5.

<sup>39</sup> Boniface, *Epistolae*, nos. 60, 62, and 77; Council of Rome (745), ed. Rau, *Die Briefe des Bonifatius*, pp. 394-414. see also the Council of Soissons (744), c. 7, MGH Conc. II, 1, p. 35: 'Similiter constituemus, ut illas cruciulas, quas Adalbertus per parrochia plantaverat, omnes igne consumantur'.

between, or even entrusted him with the actual handing over of their child.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the abbot asking leave (*licentia*) from his community prior to accepting the child represents a world very different from that of the Rule of Benedict, where the abbot consulted his flock concerning important decisions, but still had the final say in all matters.<sup>41</sup> Finally, and most importantly, Willibald's parents are depicted as acting entirely on their own, making their vows at a cross in the open air, rather than taking their sick child to a monastery or saint.

By way of contrast, a story in the *Miracula Richarii* – written shortly after 866 – followed a more orthodox pattern. One of the miracles performed by the saint involved a little boy called Albric, the only son of high-born parents, who was both crippled and dumb. His desperate parents brought him to the monastery church and laid him on the shrine containing the relics of the saint, promising to offer the child as an oblate to Richarius should he intercede on their behalf. As a sign of the seriousness of their vow (*in cuius devotionis titulo*) they gave him the tonsure on the spot; as the author explained, this would make it impossible for the boy later to renege on his parents' undertaking. Then every altar, not only in the church of St Riquier but also in that of St Marie, was draped in altar cloths; thus, Albric spent the night sleeping in the midst of solemnly draped altars. The following day he appeared to be cured, although he continued to suffer from a speech defect. Shortly after returning to his parental home he became a monk in St Riquier 'in an honourable and fitting manner'.<sup>42</sup> This miracle story fits into the traditional pattern of reciprocity between saints and their clients, in that Albric's cure was perceived as dependent upon his oblation. The parents offered their child, expecting intercession in exchange, and left no stone unturned to convince the saint of the earnestness of their intentions. Hence, the preliminary

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Boniface, who was taken to Abbot Wulfhard by 'faithful envoys' (Willibald, *Vita prima Bonifatii*, c. 1, p. 462). Orderic Vitalis was brought to St Evroul by the monk Reginald (Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, XIII, c. 45, vol. 6, pp. 552-5).

<sup>41</sup> *RB*, 3, 1-3 treats the abbot's obligation to consult his community on important matters, and to take its counsel into account. Nevertheless, it was up to the abbot to make the final decision. Cf. *RB*, c. 3, 4-5: 'Sic autem dent fratres consilium cum omni humilitatis subiectione, et non praesumant procaciter defendere quod eis visum fuerit, et magis in abbatis pendat arbitrio, ut quod salubrius esse iudicaverit, ei cuncti oboediant'.

<sup>42</sup> *Miracula Richarii*, I, p. 219.

tonsure and the solemn draping of altars. Nothing is said about the oblation ritual that eventually followed, but according to this story, the actual oblation had already been performed when Albric was brought into physical contact with the altar.

Although tales of Donatus, Willibald and Albric follow a different pattern, they have two features in common: the irrevocability of parental vows and the fact that the parents concerned made their vows in order to remedy a grievous situation. Biblical and hagiographical stereotyping did influence such motifs, but they were also shaped by social and economic reality. A lack of children could be as much of a problem as an excess of them; poor people needed offspring to help them work the land, while aristocratic landowners needed heirs. Votive masses in aid of fertility testify to this, as does a wealth of miracle stories concerning the healing of children. A woman unable to bear children was likely to be rejected, while infant mortality threatened the continuity of families. This was the background to the three oblation stories discussed above. Biblical themes – Samuel and the sacrifice of the firstborn – may have played a role in Donatus and Albric having been presented as eldest sons; of course, this also made the story even more dramatic, for it highlighted the parents' readiness to make sacrifices. At the other hand, donating the first child may have made sense to an aristocratic couple hoping for other children as a reward for the oblation of their first, while to Albric's parents a healthy son within a monastery may have been a greater asset than a crippled son outside of it. The nick-names of some monks brought up in the cloister – Notker Balbulus ('the Stammerer'), Hermannus Contractus ('the Cripple')<sup>43</sup> – suggest that a physical handicap could indeed predispose a child for monastic life. But such choices should not be viewed in terms of 'dumping misfits'. This complaint, increasingly voiced from the late eleventh century onwards,<sup>44</sup> may have been justified once the heyday of child oblation was past, but in the early middle ages plenty of healthy children found their way to the monastery. Moreover, there was nothing especially callous in selecting a crippled son for

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<sup>43</sup> Notker Balbulus, monk of St Gall (d. 912); Hermannus Contractus (d. 1024), monk of Reichenau. Both men belonged to the intellectual elite of their communities.

<sup>44</sup> Ulrich of Cluny, *Epistola nuncupatoria*, col. 635-7; cf. Lynch, *Simoniackal Entry into Religious Life*, p. 41, n. 71. Cf. below, Epilogue. The idea of child oblation being merely an subspecies of abandonment, defended in Boswell's *The Kindness of Strangers*, is based upon such complaints being projected onto an earlier period.

oblation. Monastic life would give him scope to develop his talents in directions not requiring physical prowess.

In the struggle for existence, vows constituted a means of solace to which everyone, lay or cleric, had recourse. This explains why a *votum* was more often than not situated in an informal context. Improvisation is an important aspect of ritual in any case, but especially when it came to vows: the possibilities were unlimited, varying from purely personal and spontaneous promises to public rituals in the presence of a great many witnesses. Of course parents were tempted to renege on their vows, having their cake and eating it. Oblation stories are loaded with implicit and explicit threats reinforcing canonical prescriptions. Vows should be fulfilled in time, for death may come at any moment. Since vows entailed a sacred obligation, monks should not make them without first seeking their abbot's permission, lest the promise might run counter to his primary vow of obedience. Vows were a serious matter, but precisely for this reason, ecclesiastical legislators strove for realistic compromises. For various reasons, parents might wish to substitute another son or daughter for the one they had initially promised. The *canones* of Theodore of Canterbury allowed them to do so, although it was better to stick to the original promise.<sup>45</sup> With Theodore mentioning children and animals in one breath – both could be substituted, if need be – the prescription is reminiscent of the Old Testament theme of the 'first fruit'; at the same time, it represents a level-headed facing of the facts of life. What were parents to do if their firstborn grew up strong and healthy, while they had another child, less able-bodied and therefore more suited to religious life?

Contemporary hagiography from the Anglo-Saxon realm was less lenient. Eddius Stephanus' Life of Bishop Wilfrid of York portrays a powerful mediator who clearly was not to be mocked. After a mother's vow that her dead baby would live 'for God and Wilfrid' if he were brought back to life, the saint performed the desired miracle, stipulating that the mother should care for her child until the age of seven, at which time she must 'return it to God's service'. In other words, from the moment of her vow and the saint's intercession, the mother lost control of her child. Nonetheless, led on by her husband she failed to keep her part of the bargain, all the more when she saw that her son was growing

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<sup>45</sup> *Theodori canones*, D, c. 43: 'Infans pro infante potest dari ad monasterium Deo quamvis alium vovisset. Et tamen melius votum implere. Similiter pecora cetera, si necesse est, pro eo aequali'. Cf. *ibid.*, G, c. 163; Co., cc. 183-4; U. lib. II, cc. 5-6.



up into a fine boy. She fled with her child, but was tracked down not long afterwards and made to fulfil her vow. Her son Eodwald, significantly nicknamed 'bishop's son' (*filius episcopi*) was taken into the Ripon community, where he died during an epidemic.<sup>46</sup> This poignant story highlights the potentially controversial nature of oblation vows. Parents needed saints to cure their children, making hopeful vows in order to motivate them. The price of their children's survival, however, might all too often be the eventual loss of a son or daughter they had meanwhile come to cherish. This was the social context in which hagiographers exploited the model of Samuel and Hannah to its greatest advantage.

Not all biblical models could be used in the same fashion. Hannah was exemplary in that she kept her vows, just as Samuel's obedient service in the temple represented the ideal child oblate who felt equally bound by sacred obligations. Nevertheless, hagiographical variations on this theme show how parents could be torn between conflicting desires, attempting to bring saints to save their children without having to relinquish them afterwards. In other words, the votive element in the biblical model of Samuel brings to light the reciprocal nature of relations between parents and saints. Both parties were depicted as partners in a contract, the saints relentlessly reclaiming children from parents who dared to go back on their solemn promise. But when parents are put under an obligation to 'return the fruit', the idea of *do-ut-des* as a manipulation of the supernatural recedes to the background, supplanted by that of an omnipotent deity whose continued bounty depended upon unconditional sacrifices. These are the two faces of reciprocity between God and mankind; on the one hand, the supernatural could be addressed as a personalised force and offered gifts of a provisional nature; on the other, constant sacrifices were a *conditio sine qua non* of human existence.

### 3. OBLATION AND MASS

The symbolism of the Benedictine oblation ritual is shaped by its integration into the celebration of mass. Although this most central of all

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<sup>46</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 18, pp. 38-40. The word 'reddere' is a key expression in this story; after having baptised the child, the saint '... matri infantem reddidit, praecipiens ei in nomini Domini, ut sibi filium suum in septima annorum aetate Deo ad serviendum redderet'. About this text, see Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 14-6; cf. also above, chapter I, § 5.

Christian rituals evolved in a complex and locally varied manner, its basic six-fold structure was already in place in Benedict's day and age.<sup>47</sup> The opening rites were followed by the service of readings, i.e. of 'The Epistle' (which was mostly, but not always taken from the letters of the apostles) and of an appropriate passage of the Gospel. Then came the offertory rite, in which the eucharistic gifts were brought to the altar and prepared for consecration; this part of mass started with the offertory procession of the faithful, and ended with the priest saying prayers over the bread and wine having been placed on the altar. The most sacred and therefore unvarying part of mass was the *canon actionis*, consisting of prayers preceding and succeeding its centre-piece, the consecration. The subsequent communion cycle was opened by the Pater Noster; then, the priest communicated before the faithful, both having prepared themselves by prayer. All this was concluded in the close of mass, in which blessings of the faithful figured largely.

The child was handed over at the altar during the offertory with bread and wine, thus being effectively transformed into a eucharistic offering as well. This expressive symbolism only makes sense when mass itself is perceived as a sacrificial ritual, rather than as a common remembrance of the suffering of Christ, in which the *ecclesia* – in the sense of the universal community of the faithful – continually re-lived its unity. Such had been the origins of mass, but by the ninth century the concept of mass as a sacrifice to God had become dominant, and 'specialised' votive masses distracted the attention of the faithful from the communal rites of the *missa publica*.<sup>48</sup> Within this development, Benedict's rule represents an intermediate stage. Notwithstanding his misgivings about the potentially haughty behaviour of priests, they were a significant presence within the monastic community, taking charge of the weekly celebration of mass in the oratory. The oblation ritual itself reveals the sacrificial nature of Benedict's perception of mass: because bread and wine were offerings to God, the offertory procession could serve as a suitable context for the oblation of a child.

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<sup>47</sup> This 'Roman' variety of mass conquered the Frankish realm from the late eighth century onwards; merging with indigenous traditions such as the Gallican mass, a type of ritual emerged that is generally known as 'Romano-Frankish'. The best introduction to the development of mass still remains Jungmann's standard work, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*.

<sup>48</sup> See especially Angenendt, *Missae specialis*. About the development of offertory prayers in the Carolingian age, see Tirot, *Les prières d'offertoire*, pp. 20-30.

This development set in as early as the third century, as is shown by Cyprian (d. 258) using words like *sacrificium* and *oblatio* to describe the eucharistic celebration as a whole.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, the offertory procession gradually assumed a more central place within the ceremony of mass. From the fourth century onwards, the faithful brought their offerings to church on Sunday; particularly in the Gallican liturgy the offertory procession grew into an elaborate and festive ritual. The main offerings were bread and wine. According to the council of Mâcon (585) all those neglecting to bring these gifts with them to mass would be excommunicated;<sup>50</sup> Caesarius of Arles considered it disgraceful to receive the eucharist without having offered bread and wine.<sup>51</sup> The unconsecrated remnants were to be blessed and brought as *eulogia* to the sick and ailing.<sup>52</sup> This custom of the faithful furnishing the bread and wine for consecration endured well into the Carolingian age. By then, a more rigid adherence to Old Testament precepts caused an increasing preference for unleavened bread prepared in ritually controlled circumstances; thus, active participation by the faithful bringing their home-baked bread tended to be discouraged.<sup>53</sup> This was a slow process, however, which was only completed in the eleventh century. Until then, one has to reckon with parents actually bringing the bread and wine that was used in the oblation ritual.

In spite of the tremendous importance of the offertory procession in Gallican liturgy, it was not as yet integrated into the ceremony of mass; instead, prior to mass, the faithful festively carried their gifts to an offertory table, while mass proper began with a second solemn procession, in which the clergy carried the offerings to the altar. In contrast, in the churches of North Africa, Milan and Rome the handing over of offerings

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<sup>49</sup> Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, vol. 2, pp. 2-3; Berger, *Die Wendung "offerre pro"*, pp. 60-2. According to Daly (*The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, pp. 98-100, 132-4), the perception of the eucharist as a sacrifice already prevailed in the work of Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235). Cf. also Hoheisel, 'Die Auslegung alttestamentlicher Opferzeugnisse', pp. 434-6.

<sup>50</sup> Council of Mâcon (a. 585), c. 4, *Concilia Galliae*, vol. II, p. 240.

<sup>51</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, no. 13, c. 2, p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, vol. 2, pp. 10 and 453-4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 5-17; Nickl, 'Der Anteil des Volkes an der Messliturgie im Frankenreiche'. The custom of distributing *eulogiae* persisted, however, which shows that lack of lay participation in communion was not so much a matter of 'laxity' as of rigid adherence to requirements of ritual purity. In such cases the blessed *eulogiae* could serve as a less dangerous approximation of the *terribilia sacramenta*.

by the faithful became, albeit with much local variation, part of the very structure of mass at an early date. Augustine's mother Monica daily brought her gifts to a priest, who in turn offered them to God.<sup>54</sup> In the papal stationary service of the seventh century, however, the faithful did not proceed to the altar themselves; rather, the pope approached the people, starting with the nobility, and received their offerings of bread, while an archdeacon accepted the wine.<sup>55</sup> After Roman custom was transplanted to the Frankish realm in the Carolingian age, producing the so-called Romano-Frankish liturgy, an offertory procession of the faithful became a standard feature of mass:

After the *Credo* a line was formed, which wended its way to the altar. First came the men, then the women; the priests and deacons joined in after them, with the archdeacon bringing up the rear. Frankish interpreters compared the procession to the parade of the multitude that went out to meet and acclaim our Lord on Palm Sunday.<sup>56</sup>

Lay people were no longer allowed to place their offerings on the altar themselves. Since the reception of communion had come to be an exceptional ritual, only undertaken safely after suitable purification, the connection between lay gifts of bread and wine and consecration had become more tenuous. Hence, Lent became the period of preparation prior to the once-a-year Easter communion. Partaking of *terribilia sacramenta* required a state of ritual purity.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, the altar and its immediate surroundings increasingly became a sacred precinct, out of bounds to all that might contaminate it. Women were the first to be excluded from the

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<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones*, V, c. 9, 17, pp. 66-7; idem, *Epistolae*, no. 111, 8, pp. 654-6. Cf. Jungmann, *The Mass of Roman Rite*, vol. II, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9. This remained the case well into the Carolingian age; cf. Radulf of Bourges, *Capitulaire*, c. 28, p. 256 (dating from 853-866), which mentions lay people 'qui in missarum sollempniis panum et vinum sacerdotibus ad altare offerunt'. Lay people wanting to take part in the offertory procession '*pro erroribus*' had to be in a state of purity, however; they abstained from sexual contact beforehand, and were to be ritually cleansed before approaching the altar. Regino of Prüm wished to keep the laity away from the altar altogether; he stipulated that their gifts had to be accepted by a cleric, who took them up to the altar. Cf. *De synodalis causibus*, I, c. 83, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulaire I*, c. 1, 8, p. 152. About mixing the sacred and sexuality – and its punishment in the shape of sickness, malformed children or even death, see De Jong, 'To the limits of kinship', 45-54.

vicinity of the altar, and men were soon to follow.<sup>58</sup> Offerings therefore had to be received in a location quite near to, but outside of the altar precinct (*foris septa*), where the celebrant and his assistant met the offertory procession.<sup>59</sup>

All these developments conspired to emphasise the sacrificial nature of mass. While communion became an exceptional event, the bringing of gifts, possessing an expiatory virtue highly valued by the faithful, remained frequent. Hence, ninth-century churchmen were moved to shorten the period of penance by allowing penitents to make their offerings long before they would be readmitted to communion. Participation in the offertory procession was believed to speed up the process of reconciliation, and penitent sinners were therefore eager to be granted the right to bring their gifts. Thus, offertory tended to take precedence over communion. As a ninth-century sermon had it:

On Sundays you should offer your gifts (*oblaciones*) for yourself and your family, because it is worthy and acceptable unto God that Christians having acted negligently wash off their sins through sacred oblations, alms, pure prayer, contrition, fasting and abstinence.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, the gifts of the contrite were believed to benefit first and foremost those bringing them. This is a far cry from the idea of mass as communal ritual of commemoration; instead, particularised sacrifice dominated proceedings. From here, it was only a small step to the *missa specialis*: a mass offered as a gift on behalf of a specific person or with a particular purpose, without any community being necessarily present.<sup>61</sup> This spirit

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<sup>58</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare I*, c. 6, p. 107; Radulf of Bourges, *Capitulare*, c. 10, p. 240. Cf. Dölger, 'Die Heiligkeit des Altars'.

<sup>59</sup> Jungmann, *The Mass of Roman Rite*, vol. 2, p. 9, n. 43.

<sup>60</sup> *In nomine Domini summi*, ed. McNally, 'Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons', p. 136: 'Oblaciones per dies dominicos et pro vobis et pro familia vestra debetis offerre, quia hoc dignum et acceptabile est Deo ut Christiani, quod neglegenter agunt, per sacras oblationes et per elemosinas et per puram orationem et contritionem cordis per ieiunium et per abstinenciam abluant peccata sua'. This sermon originated in an Irish milieu, but was copied into a manuscript in the Rhineland in the ninth century. See Angenendt, *Missa specialis*, p. 154.

<sup>61</sup> Current terminology eloquently expressed the sacrificial character of mass: like a child given to God, mass could be described as *holocaustum*, *munus*, *dona* or *oblatio*, while its celebration was designated by the verbs *offerre* or *immolare*. Cf. Angenendt, 'Missa specialis', esp. pp. 182-83; also Jungmann, 'Oblatio und Sacrificium'. Gregory the Great called mass a *holocaustum* when he hoped that the

of gift-giving was expressed in the canon of mass itself, with the priest presenting himself expressly as a mediator on behalf of an 'interested party' through the words 'I offer thee, O God, for N'. (*Offero tibi Domine pro N*).<sup>62</sup> In the increasingly important context of penance, alms could now be converted into the celebration of votive masses. This development was already well under way in the second half of the eighth century, with monasteries developing into prayer mills that transformed the material gifts of the faithful into spiritual ones even more acceptable to God. By 800, celebrating a multitude of votive masses had come to be perceived as a central monastic task, and as part of monastic identity. The monks of Fulda despaired when their abbot Ratger prevented them from discharging their liturgical duties by enlisting them in his grandiose church-building scheme. In 812 and 816 they appealed to successive emperors, imploring them to restore Fulda's 'old custom' of intensive prayer.<sup>63</sup>

This process did not go without criticism, but precisely the occasional disparaging remarks by Carolingian clerics reveal the growing popularity of votive masses, which threatened to supplant communal eucharistic celebration. Theodulf of Orléans expressed deep concern about the many special masses being celebrated on Sunday, distracting the attention of the faithful from the *missa publica*, and forbade his clergy to busy themselves publicly with special masses, especially at the 'canonical hour' when the community mass was supposed to be celebrated.<sup>64</sup> Which shows that even if *missae speciales* did not require the presence of the faithful, many of them in fact attended in order to see their gifts delivered to God. This keen interest on the part of the laity also shines through Walahfrid

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future bishop of Perugia '... pro filiis ecclesiae purae cotidie mentis holocaustum offerrat ...'; Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, I, no. 58, p. 81. Elsewhere, he defined *holocaustum* as a total and totally disinterested sacrifice: 'Cum enim quis suum aliquid Deo vovet, et aliud non vovet, sacrificium est. Cum vero omne quod habet, omne quod vivit, omne quod sapit, omnipotenti Deo voverit, holocaustum est' (*Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, II, no. 8, c. 16, p. 348). See also the ninth-century *Vita Alcuini*, c. 4, p. 187, which uses the word *holocausta* for mass. In shaping this terminology the Epistle to the Hebrews (especially Heb 10, 1-18) was of paramount importance.

<sup>62</sup> Berger, *Die Wendung "offerre pro"*.

<sup>63</sup> *Supplex Libellus*, cc. 1-4, pp. 321-3. Cf. Semmler, 'Studien zum Supplex Libellus'.

<sup>64</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare I*, c. 45, pp. 141-2. Theodulf urged his priests to round up everybody for public mass, 'exceptis deo sacratis feminis, quibus mos est ad publicum non egredi, sed claustris monasterii contineri'.

Strabo's critical comments on those who considered the number of offertory gifts more important than the *virtus* of the sacraments themselves; he felt compelled to remind his contemporaries that the consecrated offerings were salutary not only for the givers themselves, but also for the *ecclesia* as a whole.<sup>65</sup>

By the ninth century, the celebration of mass had become a gift (*munus*) in exchange for which the donator could expect a reward (*remuneratio*).<sup>66</sup> This development is crucial to the understanding of the ritual of child oblation. The mass could only serve as a symbolic framework for the offering of a child if this ritual itself was perceived as a sacrifice. This allowed for the metonymic connection, crucial to Benedict's oblation ritual, between the eucharistic gifts and the child. By holding the bread and wine that was about to be consecrated and by touching the altar cloth, the child also became a *holocaustum* for God.

#### 4. RITUALS OF OBLATION

Like all ritual, the oblation of children must have known many variations. Obviously, some symbols remained crucial to the operation: bringing the child into some kind of physical contact with the altar was a prerequisite, as was the use of bread and wine. Bearing this in mind, the ritual of child oblation was probably subject to change, adaptation and improvisation; when it came to the invention of tradition, the Carolingian period was more creative than most others, and not least in liturgy. Sometimes parents unwittingly had rituals performed that turned out to be entirely wrong and therefore invalid. Such was the case with the hapless lay abbot Atho – discussed above – who had given his son Lambert the cowl without offering him properly with bread and wine.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, Albric's parents incorporated one of the crucial elements of oblation – the child's proximity to the altar – in an improvised ritual which was inspired by the practice of spending the night at a saint's tomb in order to find a cure. The laity's desire to sleep *ad sanctos* made for noisy churches at night, an inconvenience about which the monks grumbled without really doing

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<sup>65</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, *De exordiis et incrementis*, c. 23. p. 500.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Amalarius's distinction between *dona* and *munera*: whoever gave the latter could expect a reward or counter-gift; Amalarius of Metz, *Expositio missae* 'Dominus vobiscum', c. 27, p. 306.

<sup>67</sup> See above, chapter II, § 3.

anything against it.<sup>68</sup> Such lay intrusion into monastic precincts must have allowed for many an uncontrolled and unrecorded ritual performance.

The same holds true for rituals of child oblation. Available sources are mainly prescriptive, indicating a general structure rather than the actual performance. Some Carolingian texts, however, do treat the oblation ritual extensively; among them, Hildemar's commentary on Benedict's Rule again stands out as one of the most informative sources. Having travelled widely through the Carolingian Empire, Hildemar is an extremely valuable witness who attempted to forge his first-hand experience of the customs of leading abbeys like Corbie and Reichenau into a practicable synthesis. His observations on the oblation ritual will therefore serve as a point of departure, and as a model of comparison which may shed light on scantier sources of information.<sup>69</sup>

Right after the reading of the Gospel, at the beginning of offertory, the parent – usually the father, but if he were no longer alive, the mother – was to place the offering of bread in his son's right hand. Prior to this, the bread had been wrapped in a special offering cloth (*mappula*), which was also to envelop the hand of the boy. In his left hand the boy was given a jug of wine to hold. Over his right hand, the father then placed his own right hand, in which he also held the *petitio*. In the oratory of the monastery – the scene of action – the father was to stand facing the abbot, holding his son in the manner just described, while the abbot questioned him about his intentions: what do you want, brother? The father then pronounced the formulaic words about wishing to follow the command of the Lord in the Law for the children of Israel. Witnesses were present, who at the abbot's request had to confirm that they had 'heard and seen'. Then the father led his son to 'the place where people usually bring their gifts' – not the altar itself, but rather a special table upon which the faithful placed their offering. On this very spot, the celebrating priest was to accept bread and wine from the boy, while the abbot positioned himself near the altar. After the father had taken his son to the altar, the final and most solemn stage of the ritual took place, with the father pronouncing the threefold monastic vows on behalf of his child and promising to strip it of all worldly possessions. He then gave the

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<sup>68</sup> Geary, 'La coercion des saints dans la pratique religieuse médiévale', pp. 150-2.

<sup>69</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, pp. 547-52.



written version of these promises – the *petitio* – to the abbot by first placing it on the altar, and handed over the boy.<sup>70</sup>

Such was the structure of the oblation ritual according to Hildemar. While adhering faithfully to the outline of the Rule, he diverged in significant details, adapting himself to changes which had occurred since Benedict's day. His recommendation that the roles of abbot and celebrating priest might best be combined in one person reflects the clericalisation of monasticism; ideally, therefore, the abbot would be the one who received the eucharistic offerings as well as the child. In general, the abbot was awarded a more prominent role than Benedict had envisaged. Although Benedict required a deposition of the *petitio* onto the altar in the case of an adult novice, the detail of the abbot lifting the document from the altar is absent from Benedict's instructions. Clearly, the oblation ritual had been influenced by the current practice of the *levatio cartae*, which had become a characteristic feature of most gifts to God and his saints;<sup>71</sup> moreover, the abbot had gained a central role in the rituals of both profession and oblation at the expense of the community. He was the representative of God and the saints, to whom the child was offered. Other

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<sup>70</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, pp. 548-9: 'Verbi gratia, cum lectum fuerit evangelium, quando debent offerre, antequam incipiant Offertorium, debet ponere in dextera manu filii sui oblatam cum mappula, in sinistram autem amulam vini. Deinde debet illum pater ante se tenere infantem, et debet involvere manum filii sui in illa mappula, cum qua offert, quia de ipsa mappula dicitur *palla altaris*, non de altaris panno sacratio. Deinde debet tenere manu sua manum filii involutam in illa mappula et petitionem, qua firmat filium suum in illo monasterio, et debent adesse testes. Tunc debet abbas interrogare illum isto modo: Quid petis frater? Ille debet respondere dicens: Volo tradere filium meum Deo omnipotenti ad serviendum sibi in hoc monasterio, quia sic praecepit Dominus in lege filiis Israel, ut offerrent filios suos Deo; et propterea ego volo hunc filium meum similiter Deo offerre. Deinde debet dicere abbas testibus: Auditis, fratres, et videtis, quid iste dicit. Illi debent dicere: Audivimus et vidimus. Tunc debet ille pater ante se filium suum ducere ad illum locum, ubi homines offerre consueverunt. Deinde debet presbyter tollere oblatam et amulam de manu infantis tenta in manu patris, et abbas debet recipere infantem et tollere petitionem, ita tamen, ut pater illam petitionem super altare reponat, eo quod abbas illam petitionem desuper altare debet tollere, quia sic in capitulo LVIII dicit: *desuper altare ponat*, et alibi: *non reddat illam petitionem, quam desuper altare tulerit*. Verumtamen melius est, si potest fieri, ut abbas cantet missam, ut ille accipiat etiam illum oblatam et vinum'.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Goldmann, '*Levare cartam*'; Steinacker, '*Traditio cartae*'; Fichtenau, *Das Urkundenwesen in Österreich*, pp. 56-72 (about the *carta*), pp. 73-87 (about the *notitia* and the *libri traditionum*).

important changes were in keeping with the increased sanctity of the altar precincts. Rather than on the altar itself, the eucharistic offerings were to be put upon a special offering table well away from the most sacred part of the oratory; moreover, the hand of the child was no longer enveloped in the altar cloth (*palla altaris*) itself. Instead, it was wrapped in an offering cloth (*mappula*), preventing the child from touching the altar cloth directly. The *palla altaris* or *corporale* of Carolingian times, in which the altar was draped at the beginning of the offertory, was considered a symbol of Christ's shroud, and therefore had to be of pure linen; on no account could the laity touch it.<sup>72</sup> Hence Hildemar's substitution, for which he apologised rather feebly by saying that a *mappula* was also a *palla altaris*, since it was used in the service of the altar.<sup>73</sup>

The altar did remain the place where the ritual culminated, however, and Hildemar seems to have had no qualms about the father approaching it to hand over child and *petitio*. Whether he would have been as lenient if the mother were the one to perform the ceremony seems unlikely. After all, women were perceived as polluters par excellence, who were preferable kept away from the altar.<sup>74</sup> Probably Benedict's precepts were sufficiently authoritative to override scruples concerning the inaccessibility of the altar precinct, so the actual oblation remained situated there.

The ritual gestures provide telling clues about the roles accorded to the participants. The presence of witnesses was apparently indispensable, but nothing is said about the monastic community taking an active part in the proceedings. They might as well have been absent, which may indeed have been the case if the oblation was set in the context of a private rather than a communal mass. The main agents were the offering father – or mother – and the receiving abbot, engaging in a formulaic dialogue. The father pronounced the vows of obedience, stability and *conversio morum*

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<sup>72</sup> Hrabanus, *De institutione clericorum*, I, c. 33, p. 75: 'Inmittitur super altare corporalis pallium, quod significat illud linteum, quo corpus salvatoris involvebatur'. Only deacons and subdeacons could touch it. The dressing of the altar with the *corporale* was a solemn ritual in itself: Remigius of Rheims, *Expositio*, col. 1252; Amalarius, *Liber officialis*, I, iii, c. 19, p. 317. *Ibid.*, c. 25, p. 319: 'Dein suscipit oblationes sacerdotum et diaconorum, quibus licitum est accedere ad altare'. About the *corporale*, see Braun, *Die liturgischen Paramente*, pp. 184-6, 205-7.

<sup>73</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 549: 'Non enim dicit in illo panno altaris involvi, qui sacratus est, i.e. qui super altare ponitur, sed de illo panno, cum quo nos offerimus, quem nos mappulam vocamus, et hoc altaris pannus est, quia officium altaris per hoc agitur'.

<sup>74</sup> See above, n. 56 and 58.

orally for the benefit of the witnesses, who ‘heard and saw’ but probably also signed the *petitio*. By contrast, the child oblate played a remarkably passive role. He held the bread in his right hand, which was appropriate by all ritual standards, for the ‘best’ hand should take the bread, which took precedence over the wine.<sup>75</sup> Although the child offered bread and wine to the priest, the crucial right hand holding the bread was enveloped in that of the father, who held the *petitio* as well as his son’s hand. In other words, the parent was operative, leading the boy up to the offering table and the altar. Hildemar made the symbolism of this ritual admirably clear:

This is why Saint Benedict teaches that [the child] must be offered with the eucharistic offerings: through what is shown outwardly, it is signified what is actually happening. That is, as the offering becomes a holocaust for the Lord, this child too may be made into a holocaust for the Lord.<sup>76</sup>

These few sentences provide a penetrating analysis of both the symbolic message and the immediate effect of the oblation ritual, explicitly using the revealing words *significare* and *efficere*. By offering the child with bread and wine, the parents turned him into a *holocaustum*, a well-burnt offering in the Old Testament sense of the word, meaning that nothing of it was left except for the smoke which rose up to the Lord. Paschasius Radbertus employed similar terminology when describing the nuns of Nôtre-Dame of Soissons as *sacrificia et holocaustomata Dei*.<sup>77</sup> The word ‘holocaust’ also referred to the consecration of the eucharistic offerings, highlighting the sacrificial nature of mass; in fact, without mass itself being considered a holocaust, Hildemar’s interpretation would have made little sense. The actual culmination of the oblation must therefore have been the moment of consecration, when not only bread and wine were transformed into a holocaust, but also the child who had offered them. This was the apotheosis of any mass, as Remigius of Auxerre explained. Then silence reigned in the entire church, every voice was stilled and all attention was turned to God, while the priest sent up the prayers of

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<sup>75</sup> See below, § 5.

<sup>76</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 549: ‘Ideo precepit B. Benedictus, cum oblatione offerri, ut per hoc, quod foris ostenditur, significetur hoc, quod geritur, i.e. sicut oblatio efficitur holocaustum Domino, ita etiam ille infans holocaustum Domino efficiatur’.

<sup>77</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio*, III, p. 104, l. 943.

consecration, expressing the *preces et vota* of the entire congregation.<sup>78</sup> This, in other words, was the moment in which the offerings of the faithful reached their destination; likewise, the transformation of the child into a holocaust reached its ultimate stage when the officiating priest consecrated the bread and the wine.

Hildemar's commentary remains silent on the choice of prayers and texts proper to the oblation mass, but some impression of the likely repertoire can be gained from other sources. A sacramentary from the abbey of St Thierry in Rheims, dating from the second half of the ninth century, contains a mass 'for a boy on the day of his oblation'.<sup>79</sup> It consists of three prayers, the first being one of the many intercessory prayers which abounded at the beginning of oblation, before the chalice was brought to the altar. These expressed the votive aspect of the Carolingian mass, and an attitude which Walahfrid Strabo criticised sharply: to his dismay, many believed that a special offering and petition must be made for each intention, since it was impossible to implore God as a community (*una petitio pro multis*).<sup>80</sup> In this case, mass was geared entirely towards the oblation of a child, which was situated immediately in an Old Testament context:

Lord, you who have consecrated the offering of Abraham the patriarch concerning his only son Isaac, and Hannah's vow concerning Samuel the prophet, we beg you grant this to your servant here, who is offered to you in the first flower of his youth, in that he may faithfully serve you in your house and that he may merit lasting and eternal glory.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Remigius of Rheims, *Expositio*, col. 1251: 'Suscipit interim sacerdos a populo oblata, ut ipse, qui est inter Deum et ipsum populum mediator, preces eorum et vota Domino offerat'. *Ibid.*, col. 1256: '... facto totius Ecclesiae silentio, in quo cessante omni strepitu verborum, sola ad Deum dirigitur intentio, et devotio cordium, sociatis sibi omnium votis et desideriiis, incipit sacerdos orationem fundere, qua ipsum mysterium Dominici corporis et sanguinis consecratur'.

<sup>79</sup> Edited by Leclercq, 'Messés pour la profession et l'oblation monastiques', after Bibliothèque de la ville de Metz, 245, fols. 98v-100 (s. XI), with the variations of the manuscript of St Thierry (Bibliothèque de la ville de Rheims, E. 320, fols. 185v-186). Cf. Leroquais, *Les sacramentaires et missels* vol. I, pp. 21-25. In citing the text, I follow the manuscript of Rheims.

<sup>80</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, *De exordiis et incrementis*, c. 22, p. 496. See also Jungmann, *The Mass of Roman Rite*, vol. 2, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Leclercq, 'Messés pour la profession et l'oblation monastiques', p. 95: 'Deus qui oblationem Abrahae patriarchae in unigenito filio Isaac et votum Annae in Samuele propheta consecrasti, concede quaesumus huic famulo tuo qui in primaeva

The second prayer adapted to the occasion was the offertory prayer. This *oratio super oblata* first became known in Frankish territory as the *secreta* ('Secret'), the silent prayer by which the priest commended the eucharistic offerings of the faithful to God; it was, as Amalarius of Metz expressed it, the 'sacrifice of bread and wine' (*immolatio panis et vini*):<sup>82</sup>

We beg you, Lord, mercifully accept the gifts brought to you and likewise your servant, and through this protect him from all danger.<sup>83</sup>

Finally there was the postcommunion, also focused on the child who had just been offered:

May the sacraments we received cleanse us from all evil, and may they exempt this servant of yours from all dangers and fill him with eternal virtue.<sup>84</sup>

These three prayers belonged to the Proper, the variable part of mass; they had a long history, for they also figure in a liturgical manuscript written two centuries later in the Benedictine abbey of St Arnoul in Metz. This provides a more complete picture of what an oblation mass must have been like, for apart from the prayers of the Proper, it contains appropriate texts for the responsorial chant and other sung parts of mass such as the Alleluia, the Offertory and the Communion.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, it gives the two readings belonging to the Proper. The second of the readings preceded the offertory and was always taken from the Gospel. For this occasion, the choice predictably fell upon the passage which tells of Christ gathering up

iuventutis suae flore maiestati tuae offertur, ut iugiter in hac domo tua tibi fideliter serviat et mansuram sine fine percipiat gloriam'.

<sup>82</sup> Amalarius of Metz, *Liber officialis*, III, c. 20, p. 323, r. 18-19: 'Quod omnibus licet simul agere, id est gratis referre Deo, hoc adclamatur; quod ad solum sacerdotem pertinent, id est immolatio panis et vini, secreto agitur'.

<sup>83</sup> Leclercq, 'Messes pour la profession et l'oblation monastique', p. 96: '[O]blata, quaesumus Domine, munera pariter et famulum tuum clementer excipe, et per haec a cunctis eum defende periculis'.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.: '[H]aec nos sacramenta quae sumpsimus a cunctis emaculent malis, et famulum tuum ab omnibus eximant periculis et populis repleant bonis'.

<sup>85</sup> Responsorium: 'Beata gens, cui Dominus est Deus, populus, quem elegit in hereditatem suum' (Ps 33, 12).

Alleluia: 'Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini' (Ps 113, 1).

Offertorium: 'Sanctificavit Moyses altare Domino, offerens super illius holocausta ...' (Ex. 24, 4).

Communio: 'Quicumque enim fecerit voluntatem Patris mei, qui in caelis est, ipse meus frater et soror et mater est' (Mt 12,50).

the little children and blessing them (Mc 10, 13-16). The selection of the first reading was harder, however, for how to find a text in the Epistles suitable to the oblation of a child? This led to an interesting divergence from usual practice, in that the customary reading from the Epistles (*lectio apostolica* or *epistola*) was supplanted by the subdeacon reciting the story of Hannah and Samuel (1 Sam 1,20-28), finishing with the words 'And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest' (1 Sam 2,11).<sup>86</sup>

Most likely both biblical readings found their way into the ritual of child oblation long before they surfaced in this eleventh-century manuscript from Metz, for the choice is indeed obvious. There was no Epistle befitting the occasion, and Samuel was by far the most important model; he figured as such in the older intercessory prayers. Since the second reading was always to be taken from the Gospel, there was less room for manoeuvring here. Still, the passage about Jesus and the children was tailor-made, beginning as it does with the words *offerebant illi parvulos ut tangeret eos*. It seems almost inevitable, therefore, that these crucial texts were already used in Hildemar's day.

There are other silences in his commentary, also needing to be filled with the aid of other sources. There is no mention whatsoever of the child being tonsured or receiving the cowl. Apparently, neither was part of the oblation ritual proper. Given Hildemar's insistence on the irrevocability of child oblation, it seems unlikely that he put off tonsure and cowl to a later date, as was the custom in Fulda; there is no indication that he envisaged anything like a confirmation of parental vows once the child had reached the age of understanding, which could figure as the occasion for the blessing of the cowl.

There seem to have been no set rules for a proper age of tonsure. Heiric of Auxerre was an oblate at seven but was not tonsured until he was nine. This did not make him into a monk, however, for he was that already by virtue of his oblation. At nine, Heiric became a *clericus*, with his tonsure placing him on the first rung of the ladder that would ultimately lead to priesthood.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, where the profession of adults

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<sup>86</sup> 'Puer autem crescebat et erat minister in conspectu Domini ante faciem Heli sacerdotis'.

<sup>87</sup> Heiric of Auxerre, *Vita metrica Germani*, VI, p. 515, l. 598; cf. Traube's introduction to Heirics *Carmina*, MGH Poet. lat. III, p. 421. Hincmar spoke of Gottschalk as 'secundum regulam oblatus et tonsuratus', making a distinction between the two rituals (*De una et non trina deitate*, c. 13, col. 578). Folcuin, however, described the case of a boy who in 826 received the tonsure from Pope

was concerned, Hildemar also kept the reception of habit and tonsure out of the ritual proper. In keeping with Corbie custom, a novice received clerical tonsure already after two months; at this point he could still opt out of monastic life, but he was to remain a cleric forever.<sup>88</sup> Receiving the habit was not part of the ceremony of profession itself; whether this happened before or afterwards was not important.<sup>89</sup> Probably Hildemar felt the same where children were concerned. Clearly, the tonsure was a clerical rather than a monastic one. Indeed, monasticism had become increasingly clericalised, while *monasteria* could be made up of communally living secular clerics as well as of monks.<sup>90</sup>

The most important lacuna, however, is the lack of data on the ritual for girls. Being destined for a male community, Hildemar's commentary of course remains silent on the topic; alas, there is no treatise for women to complement his detailed observations on ritual affairs. Girls were equally considered a *holocaustum*, but was their oblation ritual in any respect different? The consecration and *velatio* of virgins had been an episcopal prerogative from the fourth century onwards, though the bishop could delegate this task to a priest.<sup>91</sup> Officially, the same rule still applied in the ninth century, but several conciliar decrees and capitularies reveal that abbesses and even ordinary nuns tended to claim this right for themselves.<sup>92</sup> It is hard to make out whether this usurped *velatio cum benedictione sacerdotali* became part of the oblation ritual itself, although there is some evidence that this indeed was the case. As is shown by the tenth-century *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum*, the Benedictine oblation ritual left its stamp on the episcopal consecration rites for virgins. It includes an *ordo* in which a virgin is handed over to the bishop by her parents with the eucharistic offerings (*cum oblatione*), while her hand was

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Eugenius, prior to becoming an oblate in St Bertin (*Gesta abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 57, p. 615). About monastic tonsure, see especially Bock, 'Tonsure monastique'.

<sup>88</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 59, pp. 537-8; cf. Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, pp. 142-3, and Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', pp. 47-9.

<sup>89</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, p. 539: '... et hoc notandum est: sive antequam promittat, sive post vestietur in oratorium nihil obstat ...'.

<sup>90</sup> De Jong, 'Carolingian Monasticism', pp. 627-9.

<sup>91</sup> Metz, *La consécration des vierges*, pp. 99-100; Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 279-95.

<sup>92</sup> Metz, *La consécration des vierges*, pp. 101-2; e.g. *Admonitio generalis* (a. 789), c. 76, MGH Capit. I, p. 60; Council of Paris (a. 829), c. 54, MGH Conc. II, 2, p. 638. Most likely, Merovingian abbesses had already 'usurped' the episcopal right of consecrating virgins; cf. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 294.

wrapped into the *palla altaris*.<sup>93</sup> Nothing indicates that the girl was very young, or destined for a nunnery; given the prominent role of the bishop and the absence of any mention of a *petitio*, it is more likely that this rite was intended for the consecration of virgin who was to remain in the world. Bearing this in mind, the prevailing perception of mass as a sacrifice and its symbolic expression in Benedict's oblation ceremony made for a powerful combination, which even shaped rituals of consecration outside of Benedictine communities. All the more reason, therefore, to assume that the offertory of mass had also become the ritual context for the oblation of girls.<sup>94</sup>

### 5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OBLATION RITUAL

A child's oblation ceremony shared three characteristics with ritual in general: efficacy, expressiveness and the use of fixed symbols.<sup>95</sup> It was efficacious in that the child was transformed into a holocaust in the course of proceedings; moreover, it communicated to all present that the child brought to the monastery indeed was a sacrifice. The efficacy as well as the expressive force of the ritual was empowered by the third element, the use of fixed symbols. Whatever variations may have occurred, the oblation of a child could not be performed outside of the context of mass: the ritual message as well as the effectiveness of the act hinged upon the symbolic connection between the child and the eucharistic offerings. Hence, to be offered 'with bread and wine' became shorthand for stating that a child

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<sup>93</sup> *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum*, I, no. 20, p. 39; cf. Metz, *La consécration des vierges*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>94</sup> At present, this must remain no more than an assumption. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, p. 295, quite rightly concludes that no sources from Merovingian Gaul indicate that the consecration of women was connected to the celebration of mass. The same goes for male monasticism in the sixth and seventh centuries. Given the importance of mass in the oblation of boys, however, and the impact of eucharistic symbolism on the consecration of virgins not necessarily destined for the convent, it would be surprising if the oblation of girls remained entirely unaffected.

<sup>95</sup> There is a vast body of literature on 'ritual'. I only mention a few titles that have been of particular importance to me: Leach, 'Ritual'; idem, *Culture and communication*; Bloch, 'Religion and Ritual'; Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*; Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor*, pp. 289-324 ('How does a ritual mean?'). I also learned much from conversations with Douglas E. Lewis (Melbourne), during our stay at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) in 1993-1994.



had been offered in the proper manner. Conversely, if the eucharistic offerings were omitted, as had been the case with Lambert of Schienen, a parental oblation could not be considered valid.<sup>96</sup> Hildemar meant precisely that when he commented that the child holding bread and wine 'signified outwardly' what was 'actually happening'. All could see for themselves that the boy was being transformed into a *holocaustum* for God: a wholly burnt and acceptable sacrifice.<sup>97</sup>

The process of transformation was effected through successive stages of proximity with sacred matter, which established an ever-increasing homologous connection between the boy and the eucharistic offerings. After having been given bread and wine to hold, the child was then brought to the altar, where his hand was wrapped in the *palla altaris*; even when the latter was no longer possible, the ritual retained its former dynamic by the use of an alternative gesture. The parent first took the child holding bread and wine to the offering table, thus expressing the affinity between the material and the human offering. From there, the child was brought over to the altar. On this sacred spot, eucharistic and human offering merged into one *holocaustum* through two subsequent, but parallel acts: the parent handing over the child to the abbot, and the priest offering and consecrating the bread and the wine. Not surprisingly, Hildemar felt that ideally the abbot should also be the officiating priest, for this would ensure an even closer link between the child oblate and the eucharist. The process was only completed when the priest had properly performed the consecration, this being the actual moment of sacrifice. There is no indication of participants receiving communion, but the officiating priest certainly communicated. As he partook of the body and blood of Christ, by association he must also have 'partaken' of the child that had just been transformed into a holocaust – which was thus symbolically re-presented as a victim being dismembered.

The bread was obviously the more important of the two gifts, for it was held in the child's right hand; this also was the hand the father enveloped in his own when he led his son to the altar. The binary opposition of right and left has been a prevailing one in Christian liturgy, as it is in ritual the world over. The right hand is usually the favoured one, referring to the domain of sacred and legitimate power as well as to

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<sup>96</sup> See above, chapter II, § 4C.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. above, n. 76. About the 'scheme of sacrifice', see Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, pp. 20-50.

the pure,<sup>98</sup> it was the 'hand of faith', used for oath-swearing, making the sign of the cross or performing acts of consecration. Conversely, the left hand was the 'treacherous' one which swore false oaths and killed legitimate kings.<sup>99</sup> As Robert Hertz pointed out in his celebrated essay on the pre-eminence of the right hand, organic asymmetry in man is at once a fact and an ideal; right-handedness is indeed rooted in the human organism, but this in itself does not account for the prevailing association of the right hand with the cosmological and social order. 'If organic asymmetry had not existed, it would have had to be invented'.<sup>100</sup> In the case of the oblation ritual, the two hands were complementary rather than in opposition: after all, the left one also held sacred matter. When it came to the crucial acts of the ritual, however – the child holding and handing over the bread with his right hand, the same hand being enveloped in the altar cloth, the father grasping the child's hand, and his deposition of the *petitio* onto the altar – the right hand was consistently favoured.

The distinctive character of the oblation ritual becomes apparent when it is compared to profession of adults. Whereas the oblation rite was both a ritual of sacrifice and one of transition, the element of sacrifice was much less apparent in profession, which emphasised transitional aspects instead. Although the novice did indeed offer himself through relinquishing power over his own body, a closer scrutiny of both rituals reveals fundamental differences. For one thing, the rite of profession remained dissociated from mass for a long time; there is no sign whatsoever that Hildemar used mass as a symbolic context for profession, as he did in the case of oblation. The first to include a *missa pro monachis die professionis suae* is the above-mentioned sacramentary of St Thierry. The prayers used are quite revealing, with their requests that God deliver the newly professed monks from worldly concerns, carnal desire and the wiles of the 'old enemy'; they are geared towards the purification of an

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<sup>98</sup> Like many other cultures, early medieval Christian tradition also knew one hand that was the "right" one for touching food. Cf. *Paenitentiale Capitula Iudiciorum*, XXIII, c. 3i: 'Qui non idonea manu tangit lymphaticum alimentum, C manualibus plagis emendetur' (= *Paenitentiale Cummeani* XI, 15 = *Paenitentiale Remense* III, 21 = *Paenitentiale Vindobonense B* XXV, 2). See Meens, *Het tripartite boeteboek*, p. 468.

<sup>99</sup> Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice*, pp. 250-1; cf. Needham (ed.), *Right and Left*, for an intercultural analysis of these matters.

<sup>100</sup> Hertz, 'The pre-eminence of the right hand', p. 10.

intrinsically 'soiled' person.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, a 'mass for monks on the day of their profession' is surely not the same as a specific profession ritual for one particular monk being performed within the setting of a mass. More likely, monastic profession and mass remained two separate rituals, although the latter could serve to put a ritual seal upon the acceptance of new members into the community. The prayer text shows that this mass was intended for a number of monks, suggesting that the actual profession was a group affair.

The communal nature of the rite indeed allows for group profession, highlighting yet another difference between oblation and profession. In the latter case, the entire community participated in the acceptance of a new monk in their midst, so why not receive several at the same time? Theoretically, the same holds true for child oblation, but for one telling difference: a child was the gift of one particular family, which cannot have looked kindly upon their private mass being turned into a free-for-all. In other words, the oblation mass was a *missa specialis* par excellence, which was preferably celebrated exclusively in the presence of the child's donors and receivers. The oblate, moreover, was given to the abbot as God's representative, whereas the novice was accepted by the community as a whole, his plea for reception (*suscipe me*) being answered by the joint prayer of all. This entailed a reaffirmation of the community as a whole, while there was nothing intrinsically communal about the oblation ritual.

Taking the structure of both rituals into account, other differences come to light. Profession followed the pattern typical of a subcategory of rites of transition: the initiation ritual.<sup>102</sup> This makes sense, for the novice had to leave the *saeculum*, being initiated to the new world of the *claustrum*; having been 'of the world', however, he needed a transitory and probationary period, which would cleanse him from all secular pollution. In his case, the intermediary – or liminal – phase took quite some time, allowing the novice to leave the wicked ways of the world behind him step by step. If Benedict's precept was followed, the entire period between his separation from the world and his subsequent incorporation into his new state of being would take an entire year. By contrast, the transition of a child oblate was performed within the time-span of one mass. From

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<sup>101</sup> Leclercq, 'Messes pour la profession et l'oblation monastiques', pp. 94-5; Frank, 'Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der benediktinischen Profeßliturgie', pp. 115, 122.

<sup>102</sup> Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, remains the point of departure for rituals of this sort; see also Leach, *Culture and communication*.

the very moment of the ceremony onwards, the child became not only a holocaust, but also a full member of the community.

The staggering difference between the two rituals has confused historians, who have therefore attempted to reduce them to a common denominator. On the one hand, much has been made of the sacrificial nature of profession; after all, it was a *Selbsthingabe*, a sacrifice of self.<sup>103</sup> On the other, child oblation has been compared to the beginning of novitiate, on the assumption that only the child's personal profession would make it into a full member of the community. Even those who take the irrevocability of child oblation for granted still tend to stress the active role of the child. I do not deny that oblate children may have come to perceive life within the cloister as a personal sacrifice to which they devoted themselves wholeheartedly. But if they did so, this was rather the result of long and careful training within religious institutions than of any spiritual infusion of self-sacrifice during or shortly after the oblation ritual. As Folcuin wrote of his own oblation in 948: 'I was made into a monk, but alas, only externally'.<sup>104</sup> He later achieved a different insight, but such things took time. In other words, there was a vast difference between self-sacrifice and being sacrificed by others.

The radical and immediate nature of the oblation ritual has several explanations. Whereas adult novices were soiled by the world and needed lengthy purification, young children were considered sufficiently pure and innocent to enter the cloister without further delay. There was no reason to submit them to any novitiate in order to cleanse them of the memory of carnal delights and other contaminations. They were even 'clean' enough to hold bread and wine and to approach the altar, which given the pollution-conscious early medieval culture was quite a feat. But more importantly, child oblation was both a rite of transition and a ritual of sacrifice, and therefore depended upon a unity of time and action. The oblation ceremony was a *rite de passage*, in that there is a separation from a former state of being followed by an intermediate phase, which leads up to the child's transition to its new identity. Separation was accomplished by giving the child bread and wine to hold, enveloping its hand in the *mappula*, while the intermediate phase consisted of the boy being walked

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<sup>103</sup> Wollasch, 'Das Mönchsgelübde als Opfer'; Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*, pp. 65-7.

<sup>104</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 107, p. 629: '... sancto Bertino oblatus, monachus, proh dolor! facie tenuis, sum effectus'.

up to the altar by his parent, the physical motion involved expressing the dynamics of transition. The boy entered his new social role when the priest accepted the bread and the wine, and most of all, when the abbot accepted him from the hands of his father. In fact the boy was moving from his earthly family to a new, spiritual family. In cases where the abbot did not celebrate mass himself, the priest took on the role of mediator between the two worlds represented by the father and the abbot: his kindred and the monastery. At the same time, however, this *rite de passage* was also a ritual of sacrifice, which accounts for its immediacy. Once a sacrifice gets going, its drama and dynamics depend on speed; lengthy initiation rituals such as those of adult novices had no place in what was essentially a sacrificial ritual. Giving does not allow for holding back; thus a *puer oblatus* spending a provisional year as a child-novice would not have been fitting, for it would have meant postponement – and possible withdrawal – of a holocaust. Occasionally the child's need to assent in being made into an offering was indeed stressed, but this should not be mistaken for child oblation being 'voluntary'. From the perspective of sacrificial ritual, the willingness of the child to comply in what was done to him made perfect sense. In animal sacrifice the world over, 'good' sacrifice is that in which the victim goes consenting; hence, goats will not get their heads chopped off as long as they hold them down, for this is taken to be a sign of resistance.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, much was made of the readiness of Isaac and Jephta's daughter to be slaughtered, a theme which was taken up by early medieval authors as a model of obedience. There was more than submission involved, however; it was a matter of the victim readily complying in its sacrifice, thus expressing as well as ensuring the efficacy of the act of immolation. The troubling irrevocability of child oblation can only be understood when it is perceived within its proper context: sacrifice.

For this very reason, early medieval authors were adamant about oblate children never leaving the monastery, not even if they had committed sins which would have caused adults to be expelled. Moreover, it explains the irrevocable nature of child oblation which has troubled later historians so much. To reclaim a consecrated child was nothing short of sacrilege, for this amounted to the renunciation of solemn vows and the withdrawal of

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<sup>105</sup> Communication of Douglas E. Lewis, *à propos* his ethnographic film on sacrificial ritual on Flores, Indonesia: 'A Celebration of Origins'. About this aspect of sacrificial ritual, see also Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, pp. 30-1.

a sacrifice. Besides, the child was no longer of this world or its kinsmen, for it had been transformed into a *holocaustum*. The efficacy of the ritual, if correctly performed, must have been an inescapable reality to all concerned. The act could no longer be undone. This is why those contesting their oblation at a later age based their arguments precisely on procedural errors. Gottschalk complained of the absence of Saxon witnesses, while Lambert pleaded that he had been donated without the eucharistic offerings and the abbot's blessing.<sup>106</sup> Only such formal flaws could invalidate the efficacy of the ritual. To paraphrase Hildemar, if the crucial signifiers were absent, nothing had really happened. Had the ritual been performed correctly, however, the child was unavoidably and definitively transformed into a *holocaustum Domino*.

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<sup>106</sup> See above, chapter II, § 4B and C.

## CHAPTER SIX

### COMMENDATIO AND OBLATIO

#### 1. RITUALISING CHILD OBLATION

The diffusion of Benedict's Rule as the principal model for monastic life was a slow and tortuous process. The Aachen reform councils of 816 and 817 marked an important stage in the growing monopoly of the *Regula Benedicti*: from then onwards, only *monachi* and *monachae* who followed the Rule of Benedict merited the name. Consequently, many communities adhering to other, older monastic traditions opted for a life of canons or canonesses. But even officially 'Benedictine' religious life was far from homogeneous, for it was embedded in a rich and diverse legacy of monastic texts. As Hildemar's commentary shows, even communities religiously following Benedict's Rule differed widely in their interpretation of it. Given this situation, one should not expect too much uniformity in monastic practice.<sup>1</sup>

This especially holds true for the diffusion of the Benedictine ritual of child oblation, which seems to have made even slower progress than other parts of the Rule. While seventh-century rules for monks and nuns did incorporate elements of the Benedictine profession ritual, they omitted all reference to child oblation. Did this reflect some kind of hesitation or even resistance on the part of parents or monastic communities? This may very well have been the case. After all, there was no shortage of children in the monasteries concerned, so if Benedict's oblation ritual was known but not used, it must have been for certain reasons. Benedictine oblation radically separated the child from its family and inheritance, forcing parents to cut all links with their offspring. Such a drastic sacrifice conflicted with the interests of aristocratic families intent on keeping the ties with 'monastic' children intact. For a long time, therefore, parents probably preferred other means of conveying their offspring to the cloister. The Aachen reform movement represented a crucial turning point: for the first time child

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<sup>1</sup> Semmler, 'Benedictus II'; Donat, 'Les coutumes monastiques autour de l'An Mil'; De Jong, 'Carolingian Monasticism'.

oblation 'Benedictine style' was made into a universal norm. The decree of 817 ordered parents to offer their sons at the altar with the eucharistic offerings and a *petitio*, for which a suitable model was drawn up.<sup>2</sup>

What was the impact of the decree issued in Aachen 817? Was it self-evident from then on that parents should offer their sons with a *petitio* at the altar in the presence of witnesses? One way to find out is to move away from legislative sources to narrative ones. Although hagiography is a notoriously immobile and stereotype-ridden genre, saints' lives also reveal changing beliefs and practice, especially when hagiographers felt compelled to rewrite a *vita* to suit contemporary needs and tastes. Thus, social, political and liturgical transformations did leave traces in the lives of saints. Where different versions of a saint's life have been preserved a comparison may reveal shifting attitudes and developing institutions.

The different versions of the life of Gallus, disciple of Columbanus and patron saint of the monastery of St Gall indeed reflect the gradual diffusion of the Benedictine ritual of child oblation. Jonas' *vita* of Columbanus and his disciples (c. 642) relates how Gallus remained behind in the Alemanian wilderness while Columbanus travelled on to Italy, saying nothing, however, about the way Gallus became Columbanus' disciple in the first place.<sup>3</sup> For all we know, neither does the oldest full-scale *vita* of Gallus written in the late eighth century, as the first part of this text (which might have contained a description of the saint's youth) has not survived.<sup>4</sup> The first description of Gallus' childhood, brief though it is, can be found in a re-working of this first Life by Wetti of Reichenau (d. 824), dating from the early years of the ninth century. Apart from a few sentences about Gallus having been a pious and studious child, Wetti said that the boy had been 'commended' to Columbanus at his parents' instigation (... *parentum nutu commendabatur viro venerando Columbano*).<sup>5</sup> Nothing in Wetti's terminology therefore indicates that he had anything in mind like an oblation ritual performed at the altar. According to his version, Gallus had simply been entrusted by his parents to Columbanus.

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<sup>2</sup> *Synodi secundae decreta authentica* (a. 817), c. 17, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 477: 'Ut puerum pater et mater altari tempore oblationis offerant et petitionem pro eo coram laicis testibus faciant quam et tempore intelligibili ipse puer confirmet'.

<sup>3</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, I, c. 11, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Vita Galli vetustissima*.

<sup>5</sup> Wetti of Reichenau, *Vita altera Galli*, c. 1, p. 257.



The third Life of Gallus, produced by Walahfrid Strabo in 833-834, presents a different picture altogether. The parents of Gallus gave their son to God with the prescribed eucharistic offerings, placing him as a *puer oblatus* in Columbanus' care (*parentes beati Galli ... filium suum primae aetatis flore nitentum cum oblatione Domino offerentes, illius magisterio commendaverunt, ut in regularis vita proficeret*).<sup>6</sup> Here, Gallus' entry into monastic life has been furnished with all the trappings of the Benedictine oblation ritual, while the sacrificial nature of proceedings has been emphasised at the cost of the *commendatio*. Gallus was no longer entrusted to Columbanus in his guise of powerful saint and patron; rather, Columbanus is presented in his role as a monastic educator (*magister*). Was Walahfrid the first to adapt his tale to the standards set by the Benedictine Rule, and if so, was this the result of the impact of the Aachen reforms? Saints' lives in different versions being a scarce commodity, it is hard to answer this question; nonetheless, there is some supporting evidence. Another follower of Columbanus, Agilus of Rebais, remained a fairly obscure personage in Jonas' Life of the saint and his disciples, whereas in Carolingian hagiography he was made into a child oblate. Agilus' *vita* – written in the second half of the ninth century – depicts him as a boy blessed by Columbanus and dedicated to God, consequently offered as a sacrifice by his father at the altar.<sup>7</sup>

Yet another indication of the growing influence of Benedictine child oblation is provided by the *Vita Alcuini*, probably composed between 821 and 829 in Ferrières. As we have seen, the author hailed Bede as Alcuin's educator, and above all as a child oblate, 'like Samuel, from the earliest age consecrated to God, innocent of contamination of whatever vestment, and placed by his parents under monastic rule'.<sup>8</sup> The author knew Bede's brief autobiographical account in his *Historia ecclesiastica*,<sup>9</sup> but he obviously found this an insufficient description of an oblation. Hence, he

<sup>6</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, *Vita tertia Galli*, c. 1, p. 285.

<sup>7</sup> *Vita Agili*, c. 3-4, cols. 317-8; see especially c. 4, col. 318: 'Optata dehinc dies advenerat, in qua pius pater voti completor et desiderii possessor, applicans sacris altaribus carem sobolem, devotissime Deo offerret in iamdicto monasterio ...'. Cf. Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, II, c. 8, pp. 122-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Vita Alcuini*, c. 4, p. 186-7. Cf. Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, p. 27 about the date and author of this text; see above, chapter IV, n. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V, c. 24, p. 566: 'Qui natus in territorio eiusdem monasterii, cum essem annorum VII, cura propinquorum datus sum educandus reverentissimo abbati Benedicto, ac deinde Ceolfrido ...'.

changed Bede's dry comments about his having been handed over to Benedict Biscop into a 'proper' *oblatio*.

Although the biblical model of Samuel and the sacrificial connotations of child oblation have a very long history, an explicitly 'sacrificial' oblation ritual only became mandatory after the Aachen reform councils of 816/817. By the tenth century, donating a child at the altar and within the context of mass had become standard procedure. Rather of Verona (d. 974), for example, was handed over 'with bread and wine', the shorthand for being made an oblate in the proper fashion.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in his *Gesta* of the abbots of St Bertin (961-962) Folcuin routinely presented all children accepted into the community as oblates.<sup>11</sup> The ninth century seems to have been an intermediate stage, in which Benedictine child oblation was still a source of controversy and therefore all the more liable to be depicted in a normative and exemplary fashion. Rudolf of Fulda's portrayal of Lioba is perhaps the best illustration of this, his community's painful memory of Gottschalk's part-victory making it all the more imperative to hail one of Boniface's female pupils as an obedient emulator of Samuel's example.<sup>12</sup>

When Wetti wrote his *Life of Gallus* at the beginning of the ninth century, Reichenau was officially living according to Benedict's Rule. Nevertheless, contemporary sources from this important royal abbey give no indication whatsoever that children were handed over at the altar with bread and wine. Is it a coincidence that Walahfrid was the first to change Gallus' entry into monastic life into a full-fledged *oblatio*? Without wishing to overestimate the actual influence of the Aachen councils, I think they did have important practical effects in the sphere of child

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<sup>10</sup> Rather of Verona, *Dialogus confessionalis*, c. 11, p. 225, l. 148-58: 'Dum enim puerulus essem, venit quidam ingenuus et in altari quodam sancti Petri et Pauli tenens me cum pane et vino ... <obtulit Deo> ... et sancto Petro in holocaustum ... iure quasi Nazarei ... immutabiliter servituum ... ad fedus perpetuo confirmandum. Sed accepto ipse calamo matura iam etate et legitima scripsi in hunc modum scriptumque super altare posui, non super aliud nisi ipsum: *Ego Ratherius promitto stabilitatem meam et conversionem meorum morum et oboedientiam secundum regulam sancti Benedicti coram Deo et sanctis eius*'.

<sup>11</sup> Folcuin, *Gesta abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 55, p. 615 (Gundbertus); c. 58, p. 618 (Adelardus); c. 67, p. 620 (Megenfridus); c. 106, p. 628 (Adalolfus and Walterus); c. 107, p. 629 (Wago and Folcuin).

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, c. 6, p. 124: 'Et sicut Anna Samuel omnibus diebus suis in templo Dei servituum obtulit, ita hanc ab infantia sacris litteris eruditam in sancta virginitate quamdiu vixerit illi servire concedas'.

oblation, furnishing religious institutions and parents with clear guidelines for the ritual and the *petitio* alike. While doing so, the reformers must have been confronted with extremely diverse practices employing other, more informal ways of donating children. Seen in this light, Hrabanus' passionate defence of the *oblatio puerorum* has an undeniable element of 'invention of tradition', the thrust of his argument being that this was a divine institution with a historical pedigree reaching back all the way to the days of the patriarchs. During the first half of the ninth century Benedictine child oblation still needed to be defended and enforced in the face of considerable opposition.

Hagiographical sources predating the Aachen councils support the assumption that child oblation was just one of many ways in which children could be destined for religious life. While Samuel's sacrifice certainly played a role in the depiction of saintly childhood and youth, it was eclipsed by two other *topoi*. One emphasised the dramatic *conversio* of the young saint, portraying him or her as victorious after a painful conflict with resisting parents; the other represented the handing over of a child as a personal *commendatio* to a particular saint, who consequently assumed authority over his young charge. Both themes were hagiographical stereotypes, but they were also rooted in religious and social practice.<sup>13</sup> The conflict between the young saint and his family of origin emphasised the radical break with the world prescribed by the Gospels, for 'everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethern or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life' (Mt 10, 29). Luke even made hating one's family into a prerequisite for becoming Christ's disciple.<sup>14</sup> Since such texts served as the foundation charter of monasticism, they also shaped hagiographical images of entry into religious life.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, the conflict *topos* reflected some very real problems facing parents who stood to lose a child they needed as a means to further family interests. Gregory of Tours (d. 594) expressed the dilemma very well in his Life of Leobardus, where he put the following words into the mouth of the young saint's father:

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<sup>13</sup> See the pioneering and still valuable article by Weber, 'Kulturgeschichtliche Probleme der Merowingerzeit'.

<sup>14</sup> Lc 14, 26: 'Si qui venit ad me et non odit patrem suum et matrem et filios et fratres et sorores, adhuc ad animam suam, non potest esse meus discipulus'.

<sup>15</sup> Angenendt, *Monachi peregrini*, pp. 137-44.

My dearest son, why do you resist the will of your father and refuse to enter into matrimony, keeping the seed of our line alive in centuries to come? ... Why have we filled our house with riches, if there will be no progeny from our family to enjoy it?<sup>16</sup>

Leobardus was portrayed as an only son whose *conversio* would effectively endanger the continuity of his family and its patrimony. It was an effective way to highlight the saint's conflict with his family, as the father's reason to resist his son's religious wishes would be readily understood by all. As the Life of Wilfrid shows, this theme of conflict could easily be combined with that of a personal *commendatio* to a saint.<sup>17</sup> Entrusting a child to a saint in order to procure the latter's goodwill, only to reclaim it at a later stage, might have dire consequences; this is the moral of Eddius Stephanus' story of the hapless mother going back on the vows she once made to Wilfrid. Indeed, commending children to the patronage of powerful personages with the object of enhancing the child's and the family's position was also a social fact of life.<sup>18</sup> There existed but a small dividing line between commending one's offspring to sacred or to secular patrons. In the former case, the child might be claimed in the ruthless fashion of a Wilfrid or a Columbanus demanding total surrender and relinquishment of the promised child. Parents commending their children to a secular aristocrat could still use their offspring to create further advantageous alliances, notably through marriage. A son entrusted to the king and trained at court, for example, might be a source of enduring familiarity with the powers that were, while at the same time remaining a valuable pawn in the game of aristocratic marriage alliances. This no longer held true for children who had been consigned to sacred patrons. At least, such is the message conveyed by the hagiographical theme of disputed *oblatio*.

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, XX, c. 1, p. 291: 'Cur, dulcissime fili, voluntatem paternam respuis, nec iungere vis conubio, ut semen excites nostro de genere saeculis sequentibus profuturum? ... Vel cur inplemus domum opibus, si de genere nostro non processerit qui utatur?'

<sup>17</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 18, p. 38-40.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Illmer, 'Zum Problem der Emanzipationsgewohnheiten', esp. pp. 140-4; Heinzelmann, 'Studia sanctorum', pp. 131-3.

## 2. COMMENDATION, CONVERSION AND THE COURT

The best saints were those who had been holy from birth. As Gregory of Tours put it, although one also should rejoice about those who turned their backs to the world at a later stage, saints who had led a *vita religiosa* from their childhood onwards were the ones who gave most joy to the community of the faithful.<sup>19</sup> His views were echoed by the authors of the Life of Caesarius of Arles, who compared the young saint with a fruit tree, most fertile at the earliest age.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, the most ideal saint must have been Nicetius, the future bishop of Trier, who was reputed to have been born tonsured.<sup>21</sup> This predilection for early saintliness left little room for a description of real youth or personal development; the sentences devoted to the saints' childhood are often the most stereotypical sections of the *vitae*.

All the same, such texts should by no means be discounted when investigating social practice. Martin Heinzelmann's thorough analysis of Merovingian hagiography as a source for educational practice makes this eminently clear.<sup>22</sup> Of the 105 *vitae* written before the middle of the eight century, at least 73 do give some information, however brief, on the literary instruction of the saint; 50 lives provide a more detailed picture, allowing for a reconstitution of their subject's education and intellectual career. Heinzelmann's re-examination of this dossier shows that basic literary training was not restricted to religious communities or aristocratic

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<sup>19</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, prol., XX, p. 291: 'Ecclesia fidelis aedificatur, quotienscumque sanctorum gesta devotissime replecantur; et licet de his teneat maximum gaudium, quod hi qui ab initio aetatis religiosam vitam ducentes pervenire meruerunt perfectionis ad portum, tamen et de his, Domino iubente, laetatur, quod conversi a saeculo opus inchoatum valuerunt perducere, divina opitulante misericordia, ad effectum'. Cf. Illmer, 'Zum Problem der Emanzipationsgewohnheiten', pp. 140-2.

<sup>20</sup> *Vita Caesarii*, c. 4, p. 458.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, XVII, c. 1, p. 278: 'Igitur sanctus Nicetius episcopus ab ipso ortus sui tempore clericus designatus est. Nam cum partu fuisset effusus, omne caput eius, ut est consuetudo nascentium infantum, a capillis nudum cernebatur, in circuitu vero modicorum pilorum ordo apparuit, ut putares, ab eisdem coronam clerici fuisse signatam'.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heinzelmann, 'Studia sanctorum', who builds upon Riché, *Education et culture*, and Illmer, *Erziehung und Wissensvermittlung*.

households. On the contrary, formalised education became primarily the responsibility of bishops, who organised schools open to young clerics and lay children alike.<sup>23</sup> He also notes that the practice of commendation (*commendare, tradere, in obsequium deputare*) played an important part in ensuring a suitable milieu for further intellectual training. When educational facilities were lacking at home, a child might be commended to a powerful person able to furnish it with better opportunities.<sup>24</sup> With this aim in mind the young Leodegar (later bishop of Autun) was commended by his parents to the king (*regi traditus*), who facilitated his ecclesiastical career by entrusting him to the bishop of Poitiers; the bishop in turn sent the young man off to a learned priest who taught him for a couple of years and returned his charge to the bishop (*pontifici reddidit*).<sup>25</sup>

A successful secular or ecclesiastical career could therefore start with series of *commendationes*, with a boy being handed over by one protector to the next. Similarly, Eligius was entrusted by his parents to Abbo, an official at the public mint in Limoges, to learn the trade of minting; later on, the young saint put himself under the protection (*sub tuitione*) of the royal treasurer in Paris, thus ensuring his future access to the court.<sup>26</sup> Such acts of *commendatio* clearly entailed legal responsibilities for all concerned. Parents commending a son gave up at least part of their authority, for the child now owed obedience to his educator (*nutritor*). Being a *nutritor* meant that one had the duty to provide materially as well as intellectually for one's charge (*nutritus*); as is clear from the case of Leodegar being 'returned' to the bishop of Poitiers, a *nutritor* had legal rights over his protégé.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the terminology of the sources is eloquent enough: the protector exercised *patrocinium, tuitio, mundeburdus* or *potestas*, while the young charge owed him *obsequium*.<sup>28</sup> Important decisions in life – such as marriage or entry into the church – could

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<sup>23</sup> Heinzelmann, 'Studia sanctorum', pp. 124-9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-8.

<sup>25</sup> *Passio prima Leudegarii*, cc. 1-3, pp. 283-6.

<sup>26</sup> *Vita Eligii*, cc. 3-4, p. 671. This version dates from the second half of the eighth century, but was based on an earlier version dating from 673/5, which furnished the data on the saint's *studia*; cf. Heinzelmann, 'Studia sanctorum', p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Illmer, 'Zum Problem der Emanzipationsgewohnheiten', pp. 140-1.

<sup>28</sup> The best treatment of early medieval patronage and its terminology is still to be found in Fustel de Coulanges, *Les origines du système féodal*, pp. 248-92; see also Guilhaume, *Essai sur l'origine de la noblesse*.

not be made without the express consent of one's *nutritor*. The young courtier Wandregisil obviously broke these rules when he became a cleric without asking King Dagobert I (629-639) for permission, for he had the full force of his royal *nutritor*'s righteous anger visited upon him.<sup>29</sup> A letter from Marculf's collection of *formulae* shows that he should have obtained the king's permission in writing before taking such a momentous step.<sup>30</sup>

All those in positions of power, be they kings, bishops, abbots, courtiers or aristocrats, could expect to find themselves surrounded by *nutriti*. Patronage not only governed relations within the secular elite but also played a vital role within the clergy. When bishop Desiderius of Vienne, cornered by his enemies, holed up in his palace he was surrounded by his household: '*... omnemque nutrituram et familiam circumdatus ...*', the expression *nutritura* referring to those being educated in the episcopal household.<sup>31</sup> The latter was as good a starting point as any for an ecclesiastical career, especially for children who were relatives of the bishop himself. Family connections and ecclesiastical patronage could be mutually reinforcing, as in the case of Gregory of Tours, raised and educated by two episcopal uncles, Gallus of Clermont-Ferrand and Nicetius of Lyon. Gregory was only eight years old when he entered the second's household.<sup>32</sup>

Gregory was familiar enough with the ins and outs of *commendatio* to poke fun of those who did not know how to use it to their advantage. A priest named Transobadus had commended his son to the *maior domus* Gogo, assuming that this gesture would yield him the desirable see of Rodez; with malicious glee Gregory related how Transobadus' calculations went awry.<sup>33</sup> The story demonstrates that a well-judged *commendatio* might be advantageous to the entire family of a commended child. Gogo had been a judicious choice indeed, for his patronage was sought by many. Venantius Fortunatus painted a vivid poetical portrait of this powerful *maior domus*, seated in the *aula palatina* and cheered by an

<sup>29</sup> *Vita Wandregisili*, c. 7, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Marculf, *Formulae*, I, no. 19, MGH *Formulae*, pp. 55-6. For a comparable request to be released from royal service, see the ninth-century *Vita Geremari*, c. 8, p. 630.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita altera Desiderii*, c. 7, p. 640.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, II, c. 2, p. 220; *ibid.*, VIII, c. 2, p. 242.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, lib. V, c. 46, p. 256.

admiring flock of protégés.<sup>34</sup> No doubt his power and that of other magnates was considerably enhanced by his role as an educator and protector of young aristocrats.

Of course the *aula regis* was the most favoured place to send one's son.<sup>35</sup> Aristocrats had direct access, while those of lower birth such as Eligius were compelled to take a more indirect route, approaching provincial and court officials first before they succeeded in becoming courtiers themselves.<sup>36</sup> The court could provide primary education if need be, for young princess Radegunde seems to have been educated (*litteras erudita*) together with other children in a royal villa.<sup>37</sup> All the same, the *aula regis* was not the most obvious place to receive a primary education. Most of those arriving there were already sufficiently versed in 'letters' to hold their own in a scholarly debate. From the correspondence of Bishop Desiderius of Cahors it becomes clear that he and his youthful companions at the court of Chlotar III (613-629) were well educated, to say the least. In letters to his colleagues Abbo of Metz and Dado of Rheims he reminisced about their learned conversations in the *aula regis*, giving the impression that the intellectual standards amongst young courtiers were rather high.<sup>38</sup> The same held true for Bishop Arnulf of Metz (d. c. 640), who was *bene edoctus* when he was commended to the court. There, at a more advanced age (*aetas roboratus*), his practical training, certainly

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<sup>34</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII, 4, p. 156, l. 25-6: '...sive palatina residet modo laetus in aula/cui scola congregiendi plaudat amore sequax?' Gogo himself was a royal *nutritus* (Fredegar, *Chronicae*, c. 59, p. 109), who became the educator (*nutricius*) of King Childebert II (Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, lib. V, c. 46, pp. 256-7).

<sup>35</sup> Commendation to the king himself: *Vita Aridii*; *Vita Austregisili*; *Passio prima Leodegarii*; *Vita Boniti*; *Vita Filiberti*; *Vita Desiderii*. To magnates at court: *Vita Arnulfi*; *Vita Eligii*; Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrocli*.

<sup>36</sup> *Vita Eligii*, cc. 3-5, pp. 371-3; another saint of comparatively humble birth, Patroclus, ran away to school and was later educated by the *maior domus* Nunnio. Gregory of Tours describes him as being jealous of his brother Antonius going to school like a *nobilis*, while he – Patroclus – was compelled to look after his parents' flock of sheep. Obviously, in Gregory's mind there was a clear connection between learning and *nobilitas*. Cf. Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, IX, c. 1, pp. 252-3.

<sup>37</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis*, c. 2, p. 365: 'Quae veniens in sortem praecelsi regis Chlotharii, in Veromandensem ducta, Adteias in villa regia nutriendi causa custodibus est deputata. Quae puella inter alia opera, quae sexui eius congruebant, litteris est erudita ...'.

<sup>38</sup> Desiderius of Cahors, *Epistolae*, I, no. 9 and 10, pp. 198-9.



including military skills and hunting, started.<sup>39</sup> An admittedly late source, the *Gesta Dagoberti* (written shortly before 835), reveals a strategy of socialisation that cannot have changed much since the early days of the Frankish kingdoms. In his childhood the young prince received a christian literary education from Bishop Arnulf of Metz, but when he reached adolescence he turned to hunting, 'as is the custom of the Frankish people'.<sup>40</sup> The *Vita Ansberti*, a text from the late eighth century, also portrayed the *adolescens* and future king Theuderic hunting, 'as befits his position and birth'.<sup>41</sup> A contemporary source, Donatus' Life of Trudo, even spoke of the 'rite of hunting' (*ritus venandi*), in which all aristocratic youngsters at court participated. Whoever withdrew from this common ritual was considered to have degenerated from his rank.<sup>42</sup>

Entering the church ideally implied forsaking an aristocratic life-style typified by fighting, hunting and, eventually, an advantageous marriage. Worlds that were in fact interconnected needed to be clearly demarcated. Some hagiographers therefore depicted royal service and entering the church as incompatible, the *topos* of the contentious conversion helping to shape their story. Such was the case of Wandregisil, portrayed as courageously facing the king's wrath when he had secretly converted to the clerical state. Austregisil, later bishop of Bourges, faced opposition from his parents as well as the king when he decided to enter the church. Having been commended to King Guntram and educated as a lay

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<sup>39</sup> *Vita Arnulfi*, c. 3, p. 433.

<sup>40</sup> *Gesta Dagoberti*, c. 2, p. 401: 'Cum autem adolescentiae aetatem, ut genti Francorum moris est, venationibus exerceret'. About the royal hunt, see also the *Vita Condedi*, c. 4, p. 647, which was written at St Wandrille at the beginning of the ninth century.

<sup>41</sup> *Vita Ansberti*, c. 4, p. 621.

<sup>42</sup> Donatus of Metz, *Vita Trudonis*, c. 4, p. 278: 'Contigit autem, ut, labentibus secundum humanam consuetudinem annis, sanctus puer adolescentiae pertingeret florem. Veniebant itaque ad eum, ut erat nobilissima stirpe creatus, incliti quique iuvenes coetani eius ortabanturque eum, immo postulabant, ut una cum illis, ut mos est regiis pueris, venandi exerceret ritum'. When the young saint had repeatedly refused to join them, 'coeperunt praefati iuvenes despicere eum et quasi degenerem aestimare'. The royal hunt served as a rite of initiation and as 'an exercise in co-operation'; when Louis the Pious regained his throne in 834 historiographers made a point of referring again to his hunting exploits with the nobility. Cf. Nelson, 'The last years of Louis the Pious', p. 154. On hunting as a determining factor in aristocratic identity, see also Verdon, 'Recherches sur la chasse en occident' and Irsigler, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des frühfränkischen Adels*, pp. 243-8.

aristocrat, he returned to his family where his father had already made detailed plans for his marriage. The hagiographer presented the ensuing conflict as the usual one between father and son, with marriage as the bone of contention.<sup>43</sup> In the background, the king played a role as well, for it took the intervention of a bishop to liberate Austregisil from royal service and to ensure his entry into the church.

Generally, however, hagiographers treated the *aula regis* in a sympathetic fashion, depicting it as a suitable training ground for future ecclesiastical and secular leaders. Here young aristocrats learned how to behave as proper Franks. Their eminently practical education at the court usually started only at adolescence. There they mastered the art of suitable conversation and etiquette, served at the royal table, went out hunting together and perfected their *virtus belligerandi*.<sup>44</sup> Literary activity could be part of the program, but this was not the main purpose of the enterprise. The most important aim of educating noble children at the court was building a network of loyalty. Having gained a high office, those who grew up together could rely on one another, while also being able to profit from their familiarity with the monarch and his household. To the king and his major court officials, the young charges being raised in the *aula regis* likewise represented a valuable source of future allegiance. When the later bishop of Cahors, Desiderius, was still the king's treasurer, he had many 'under his protecting wing' (*sub ala tuitionis*).<sup>45</sup> After their stay in the royal household, the Merovingian

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<sup>43</sup> *Vita Austregisili*, c. 2, p. 192; for other conflicts revolving around the saints' refusal to marry, see Gregory of Tours, *Vita patrum*, IX, c. 1, p. 252; *ibidem*, XX, c. 1, p. 293; Donatus of Metz, *Vita Ermenlandi*, c. 1, p. 684-5.

<sup>44</sup> The hagiographer of Bishop Arnulf of Metz praised his *virtus belligerandi*: *Vita Arnulfi*, c. 4, p. 433. About the practical nature of training at the court, see Guilhiermoz, *Essai sur l'origine de la noblesse*, pp. 427-9. The idea that the Frankish court was anything like a 'school' in the modern sense of the word has been laid to rest long ago by Vacandard, 'La scola'; cf. also Riché, *Education et culture*, pp. 282-4. Still, as Riché rightly remarked, the court was not so much a military *Gefolgschaft* as a training ground for future royal servants ('école des cadres'); *ibid.*, p. 284. Cf. also De Jong, 'Merovingische en vroeg-Karolingische heiligenlevens', pp. 46-9.

<sup>45</sup> *Vita Desiderii*, c. 5, p. 566; once having become a bishop Desiderius remained a sought-after patron, as is apparent from a letter by Verus of Rodez who placed two of his young relatives under Desiderius' *defensio protectionis*; Desiderius of Cahors, *Epistolae* II, 19, p. 213. About Desiderius and his role at the court: Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 149-52.

ruling class continued to be *domestici regis*, confidants on whom the king expected to rely also after they had left his court.<sup>46</sup>

Secular and ecclesiastical officials therefore were recruited from the ranks of former *nutriti*. This is precisely why court life surfaces in the *vitae* of a number of influential bishops; by the beginning of the seventh century, young Frankish and Burgundian aristocrats increasingly viewed the episcopal office as a desirable power-base.<sup>47</sup> Having been trained at the court, they were then sent out to serve the king in important sees. Sometimes bishops visiting the court did a bit of talent-spotting themselves, as in the case of Aridius, seen in the *aula regis* by Nicetius of Trier and subsequently adopted as his protégé.<sup>48</sup> Although parents like those of Austregisil might not have envisaged such a destiny for their son when they commended him to the king, being educated at the court could indeed be the start of a successful ecclesiastical career. It is not surprising, therefore, that hagiographers edged away from the theme of the dramatic *conversio*, preferring to describe the transition from the *aula regis* to the church as a smooth and entirely self-evident change of scenery.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the *topos* of the parents resisting their offspring's intention to enter into religious life seems to have become less prominent after the first half of the sixth century, being more and more replaced by that of good christian parents who supported their pious son or daughter.<sup>50</sup> This makes sense, for these saints' lives were written in a society in which the church increasingly offered opportunities for leadership to the aristocracy. The institutionalisation of *conversio* called for a gradual playing down of its contentious nature.

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<sup>46</sup> After his education at the court, Arnulf remained the *domesticus et consiliarius regis*; cf. *Vita Arnulfi*, c. 7, p. 434. See also Riché, *Education et culture*, pp. 283-4.

<sup>47</sup> Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, pp. 122-33, 487-9.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, lib. X, c. 29, p. 522. About another prelate selecting promising youngster during his travels, see *Vita Gaugerici*, cc. 3-4, pp. 653.

<sup>49</sup> Heinzelmann, 'Studia sanctorum', pp. 132-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

### 3. EDUCATING FOR GOD: PARENTS, GODPARENTS AND FOSTER-PARENTS

The theme of parental resistance persisted longest in the lives of children destined for the cloister, for here it remained important to emphasise the separation from the world. The *Life of Rusticula*, written in the middle of the seventh century, tells the dramatic story of a very young girl who was abducted at the age of five to be educated in the household of the mother of her abductor and future husband; shortly afterwards, she was placed in the convent of St Jean of Arles at the orders of the king, much to the chagrin of her mother, who did her utmost to tempt her daughter to return to the world. Obviously she preferred to see Rusticula married to her illustrious kidnapper, for she implored the bishop of Arles to return her only child to her:

I contemplate the riches of my household, my innumerable servants, and I do not know to whom I shall bequeath them ... Who will care for me in my old age, now that I have lost my only daughter? I search for my progeny and cannot find it; I do not know where to run or to turn to.<sup>51</sup>

The bishop refused to go against God's wishes, explaining that no earthly wealth could compensate for a spiritual inheritance. The desperate mother then sent envoys bearing jewelry and other rich gifts to the convent to entice her daughter back into the world. But the girl, barely five years old, 'despised it all like shit' and persevered in her vows.<sup>52</sup>

Even toddler saints were portrayed as heroically overcoming parental resistance. Although Boniface cannot have been more than five years old

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<sup>51</sup> *Vita Rusticulae*, c. 5, p. 342: 'Aspicio domus facultates, familiae innumeram multitudinem, et cui haec derelinquam, ignoro. (...) Quis nunc aetatem meam fovebit, unica quam habebam amissa? Quaero sobolem meam, et non invenio; ubi curram, ubi divertam, ignoro'.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Sed illa, cuius fidei fundamenta stabilita iam erant supra petram firmissimam, omnia tamquam stercus respuens, una eademque perseverabat immobilis'. Rusticula indeed was little more than a toddler; c. 6, p. 342 relates how she learned the psalms by heart in spite of having fallen asleep during the office sitting on the lap of an older nun: 'Nam fertur aliquando, dum infans psalmos pararet, et ut adsolet infantia, sompno occuparetur, recumbens in genua uni de sororibus, psalmum et ipsa in aure dicebat. Quae mox ut expergefata fuisset, tamquam si eum legisset, ita memoriter recensebat ...'. Cf. Muschiol, *Famula Dei*, pp. 308-9.

at the time, his hagiographer still typified his entry into monastic life as the result of the child defying his father's wishes.<sup>53</sup> The Life of Amandus (c. 750) also cast the saint's father in the villain's part: having placed his son in a monastery, the father changed his mind and tried fruitlessly to withdraw him again.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Jonas' Life of Columbanus and his disciples (c. 642) tells of the plight of Burgundofara who, though blessed by Columbanus himself, was nonetheless to be married to a desirable aristocrat by her father. Burgundofara resisted her father's plans as best as she could, going as far as fleeing to the church of St Peter and St Paul, but her father relentlessly sent armed servants to bring her back. Although Burgundofara was quite ready to die rather than to marry, Columbanus' successor Eustasius saved her from that fate, 'giving the father a terrible telling-off' (*patrem terribiliter increpat*).<sup>55</sup> She subsequently received the appropriate episcopal consecration and entered Faremoutiers.

Burgundofara's story reveals the difference between entrusting one's child for further education (*commendatio*) and committing it to God by way of a saint. Columbanus's blessings of the offspring of aristocratic Franks and Burgundians were obviously meant to have lasting consequences. The brothers Ado, Rado and Dado (Audoenus), offered by their parents to be blessed by the saint, were all three destined for a life in the church.<sup>56</sup> Jonas described Burgundofara as a 'promised gift' (*pollicitus munus*),<sup>57</sup> implying that once her father had offered his daughter to Columbanus he indeed deserved a thorough dressing-down when going back on his promise. A similar theme of irrevocable obligation dominates the story of Donatus, a boy conceived only through Columbanus' intervention on condition that he be handed over to him at a suitable age. In Donatus' case, the solemn agreement between parents and saint was sealed by the latter becoming the boy's godfather.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Willibald, *Vita prima Bonifatii*, c. 1, pp. 460-2. About the conflict topos and *conversio* and *peregrinatio* in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, cf. Angenendt, *Monachi peregrini*, pp. 130-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Vita prima Amandi*, c. 3, p. 432-3.

<sup>55</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, II, c. 7, pp. 120-1.

<sup>56</sup> *Vita tertia Audoeni*, c. 4, p. 82; Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, pp. 124-7.

<sup>57</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, II, c. 7, p. 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 14, p. 79: 'Quem vir sanctus suis manibus receptum sacrauit sacroque lavacro ablutum ipse suscepit Donatumque nomen inponet'. About Donatus' family, see Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, pp. 142-3.

Gregory of Tours already testified to the importance of spiritual kinship as a religious and socio-political institution in Gallo-Roman and Frankish society.<sup>59</sup> The lasting bond with the godparent represented a valuable social asset, not only to the godchild but also to its natural parents who entered into a relationship of compaternity with the baptismal sponsor and his kin.<sup>60</sup> From the early eighth century onwards incest prohibitions extended to spiritual kindred, revealing that godparents and their relatives had indeed come to be viewed as part of one's kin.<sup>61</sup> Baptismal sponsorship apparently gained the upper hand on other sources of artificial parenthood, such as investing a boy with his weapons or assisting at his first hair-cutting, for these rituals concerned only boys while baptismal sponsorship also included girls. Each newly born child required godparents, thus allowing the network of social and religious alliance to grow over time.<sup>62</sup> The significance of the social alliance created by *compaternitas* becomes clear from a long-standing tradition forbidding monks and nuns to enter into such a relationship. Spiritual parenthood would inexorably draw them back into the world they had supposedly left.<sup>63</sup> Yet

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<sup>59</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, lib. X, c. 28, pp. 520-21. About the role of artificial kinship in the Merovingian kingdoms, see Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption*, who explores its importance to royal strategies of alliance and power.

<sup>60</sup> Recently a number of important publications have been devoted to this topic: Angenendt, 'Taufe und Politik'; idem, 'Das geistliche Bündnis der Päpste mit den Karolingern'; idem, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe*; Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*; Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption*. See also Nelson, 'Parents, children and the church', pp. 100-5.

<sup>61</sup> Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 222-3, 252-4; De Jong, 'To the limits of kinship', pp. 39-43.

<sup>62</sup> Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, p. 180.

<sup>63</sup> Most explicit in this respect: Ferreolus of Uzès, *Regula ad monachos*, c. 15, p. 133: 'Baptizari in monasterio parvulos tractavimus necessarium non esse, sicut in reliquibus monasteriis observatur; neque monacho ullo loco lavacro filios cuiuslibet excipere: ne parentibus illius, ut fieri solet, illicita paulatim vel turpi familiaritate iungantur. Quod si quis praesumpserit, ut transgressor regulae corrigatur'. Cf. also Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 11, p. 188; Aurelian of Arles, *Regula ad monachos*, c. 20, col. 390; idem, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 16, col. 402; Donatus of Besançon, *Regula ad virgines*, c. 54, p. 291. Cf. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, pp. 152-6; Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption*, pp. 280-1, is critical of Lynch's assumptions about the early popularity of compaternity, and points out that only Ferreolus mentions *compaternitas* as a possible source of trouble; however, Ferreolus' reference to a widespread refusal by monasteries to baptise children as well as his expression 'ut fieri solet' when discussing the dangers of compaternity seem to

the author of the so-called *Regula Tarnatensis*, composed between 551 and 573 in southeastern Gaul, took a more lenient view of things, obviously because he was familiar with the overwhelming demand for monastic godparents. He only prescribed punishment for a monk who had become a spiritual parent without his abbot's permission; charity should be exercised, however, '... if there is some compelling reason, or if he [the monk] is moved by the prayers of some faithful person and cannot avoid these forbidden things ...'.<sup>64</sup>

The author of this monastic rule was facing social facts: the spiritually powerful were especially sought after among those singled out to stand as godparents.<sup>65</sup> Saints' lives abound with 'men of God' who served as *patres spirituales* to the sons and daughters of the elite. Kings and aristocrats entreated Amandus to bless their children or to 'receive them from the sacred font',<sup>66</sup> while Ursmar of Lobbes was 'godfather to many because of his great sanctity'.<sup>67</sup> The gains of baptismal sponsorship were very similar to those ensuing from the act of *commendatio*, in that the child acquiring a powerful protector-cum-educator and its parents an ally. But when a *vir dei* was brought into play, the rules of the game were likely to change. Saints jealously claiming their rights over children in the face of unwilling parents are familiar figures of early medieval hagiography. Such rights could be based upon a *commendatio*, a blessing, a baptismal sponsorship or any combination of these rituals. Involving a holy man in the baptism of one's children, however, was a particularly effective method of procuring one's share of sacred power.<sup>68</sup> As Jussen

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confirm Lynch's view.

<sup>64</sup> *Regula Tarnatensis*, c. 3, 2-3, pp. 19-20: 'Spiritalem se fieri patrem sine abbatis imperio nullatenus adquiescat; sed si causa tantae necessitatis existerit, aut cuiuscumque fidelis personae precibus inclinatus interdicta non valet effugere, quod contradicenti cognoscitur inpositum, caritatis intuitu est omnimodis omittendum'.

<sup>65</sup> Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption*, pp. 275-7, 288-91.

<sup>66</sup> *Vita prima Amandi*, c. 17, p. 441; see also Hildegarius of Meaux, *Vita Faronis*, c. 102; p. 194.

<sup>67</sup> Anso, *Vita Ursuari*, c. 2, p. 456-7: 'Qui ob magnitudinem suae sanctitatis spiritalis effectus pater multorum est ...'.

<sup>68</sup> Donatus, *Vita Trudonis*, c. 15, pp. 286-287; *ibid.*, c. 19, p. 29; *Vita Fridolini*, c. 24, p. 365; *Vita Gamalberti*, c. 4, p. 188. Irish saints also 'claimed' children through baptism; here it was the act of baptism itself, however, rather than the baptismal sponsorship ('*a sacro fonte suscipere*') which gave the saint the right to determine the child's future. See, for example, *Vita Berachi*, c. 4, p. 76; *Vita Declani*, c. 21, p. 54: '... [Declanus] illum infantem baptizavit, et dedit ei nomen Chiaranum.

pointed out, both the laity and the saints could take the initiative. Members of the lay elite treated spiritual parenthood as one way of securing an enduring alliance with a holy man and his monastic foundation;<sup>69</sup> the wandering saints themselves could fill their monasteries with their spiritual children.<sup>70</sup>

Whatever the case, parents partly or entirely relinquished their authority over their children; this was the price they had to pay for the support of a holy man. Bishop Wilfrid personally supervised the career of the young nobles entrusted to him for an education:

Secular chief men too, men of noble birth, gave him their sons to be instructed, so that, if they chose, they might devote themselves to the service of God; or that, if they preferred, he might give them into the king's charge as warriors when they were grown up.<sup>71</sup>

To a large extent parents also lost authority over their sons when they commended them to the king or a magnate. The more powerful the *nutritor* was, the more benefits could be expected from the alliance, and the less likely the parents were to retain any control over their offspring's destiny.<sup>72</sup> All the same, a royal *nutritus* might still eventually return to his ancestral home, as Austregisil did, to marry a girl of his father's

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Et ait sanctus episcopus illis post baptismum: Hunc meum spiritalem filium diligenter nutrite; et apto tempore ad docendum viris tradite eum catholicis'. This is reminiscent of Eddius Stephanus' *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 18, p. 38, where the saint's spiritual fatherhood also was established by the act of baptism: 'Resuscitatum itaque et baptizatum matri infantem reddidit, praecipiensque ei in nomine Domini, ut sibi filium suum in septima annorum aetate Deo ad serviendum redderet'.

<sup>69</sup> Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption*, p. 277: 'Kurz: Die Patenschaft war eines der Mittel, mit denen die Grossen versucht haben, einen Heiligen in der Nähe ihres Adelssitze anzusiedeln, eines der Mittel, die Gottesmänner und die von ihnen gegründete Kultstätten zu "privatisieren"'.  
<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>71</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 21, p. 44: 'Principes quoque seculares, viri nobiles, filios suos ad erudiendum sibi dederunt, ut aut Deo servirent, si eligerent, aut adultos, si maluissent, regi armatos commendaret'. This is a nice example of *commendatio* with options kept open; the powerful saint served as an intermediary between noble families and the court. He rather than the parents was the one to perform the *commendatio*.

<sup>72</sup> According to Illmer, 'Zum Problem der Emanzipationsgewohnheiten', pp. 140-4, *commendatio*, like *oblatio*, generated lifelong obligations on the part of the parents and the child. This may be putting it a bit strongly, if only because a patron could in due course be exchanged for an even more powerful one.



choice. This obviously was impossible if a saint claimed a child as his own to be taken off to the monastery. Was there an element of *oblatio* involved, shifting the balance of power inexorably towards the holy man who had 'received' the child from the baptismal font? Something of the sort is indeed suggested by the stories of Donatus, Burgundofara and the boy nicknamed 'son of the bishop', dragged away from his mother by Wilfrid. Still, 'sacrificial' terminology is comparatively rare in pre-Carolingian hagiography. More often a child's acceptance into the cloister was depicted as resulting from his having been personally entrusted to a monastic educator who served as his *nutritor* both spiritually and materially. *Vitae* originating from the milieu of the eighth-century missionaries and their disciples provide some especially good examples of such religious *commendatio*. Willibrord was put in charge of two highborn children to 'educate them for God';<sup>73</sup> for the same reason Liudger, the later bishop of Münster, was taken to Gregory, abbot of the *monasterium* founded by Willibrord in Utrecht.<sup>74</sup> In both cases the standard expression was *commendare ... Domino nutriendum*. The saints' lives such *nutriti* later wrote of their educators show that a 'commendation' of this sort could forge a lifelong spiritual and emotional attachment.<sup>75</sup> Such loyalty based on *commendatio* bolstered missionary efforts in the eighth and early ninth century: Boniface created a network of spiritual relationships lasting for generations. Not only did he keep in touch with kinsmen and fellow religious from his native country, but he also started to build a network of spiritual sons on the continent. Having encountered the future Abbot Gregory as a young child at the home of his grandmother Addula, he resolutely took him away when the boy turned out to have a proclivity for Latin.<sup>76</sup> As soon as Boniface's mission in Southern Bavaria got under

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<sup>73</sup> Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, c. 5, p. 10: 'Quae videlicet Adelburg pridem suos duos germanos fratres sancto commendavit episcopo Willibrordo, de quo superius diximus, Domino nutriendos, quorum maior Willibraht, minor autem Thiadbraht vocabatur'. Adelburg was Liudger's maternal grandmother. See about this text Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 24-7, and especially Lebecq, 'La famille et les apprentissages de Liudger', who provides a French translation of cc. 1-12.

<sup>74</sup> Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, c. 9, p. 13-14. Gregory, who died around 776, had been in function since 747 as abbot of the Utrecht *monasterium*; cf. Schieffer, *Die Entstehung von Domkapiteln*, pp. 177-9.

<sup>75</sup> Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 1, p. 66; Eigil, *Vita Sturmii*, c. 1, p. 131; Brun Candidus, *Vita Eigilis*, c. 2, p. 68. All three hagiographers expressed their affection for their educators to whom they devoted saints' lives.

<sup>76</sup> Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 2, p. 68.

way, 'nobles began to offer their children to him to raise them in the service of the Lord'. Among them was young Sturm, who was to become the head of Boniface's chief monastic foundation, Fulda.<sup>77</sup> In turn, Sturm became the *nutritor* of another abbot of Fulda, Eigil. The latter was about seven years old when his parents presented him 'in an honourable fashion' to Sturm, whose pupil he remained for more than twenty years.<sup>78</sup> In this case, the bond between *nutritor* and *nutritus* was strengthened by ties of blood, for Sturm and Eigil were kinsmen.

There is a recurrent pattern of individual monks assuming personal responsibility for the care and education of children, serving as foster-parents while 'bringing them up for God'. Along with *commendatio* and baptismal sponsorship, the practice of fosterage may also have influenced the way children were accepted into monastic life. Especially in Ireland it was customary for children at all social levels to be sent away from home to be fostered while still very young.<sup>79</sup> Jonas probably referred to this usage when writing that Columbanus's mother surrounded her son with so much care that she refused to relinquish him into the care of relatives, as other parents were wont to do.<sup>80</sup> Children could be taken into fosterage either 'for affection', e.g., for free, or on payment of a fixed fee. Whatever the case, the foster parents were obliged to raise their charge in accordance with his or her social rank. Fosterage arrangements were binding contracts which could not be arbitrarily broken by either party, with the foster-father assuming legal responsibility for the child. According to early Irish law children could leave fosterage at age fourteen at the earliest, or at seventeen at the latest, but the bonds of affection forged

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<sup>77</sup> Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, c. 2, p. 131: '... coeperunt ei certatim viri in servitium Domini nutriendas suas offerre soboles. Tunc etiam puer Sturmi precatu parentum ab eo est susceptus, qui Norica provincia exortus, nobiles ex christianis parentibus generatus et nutritus fuit'.

<sup>78</sup> Brun Candidus, *Vita Eigilis*, c. 1, p. 223. Brun says that Eigil's oblation occurred shortly after Boniface's death; Sturm died in 779. If Eigil, as he wrote himself, indeed was Sturm's pupil for more than 20 years, his oblation may have taken place in the years 755-778. This would mean that he was born around 750. Cf. Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturmi*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>79</sup> Kerlouegan, 'Essai sur la mise en nourriture'; Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 86-90.

<sup>80</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, I, c. 2, p. 67: 'Quem mater postquam edidit, tanta custodia servavit, ut vix eum vel cognitis parentum reliquorum moribus crederet ...'.

lasted much longer.<sup>81</sup> This was after all the aim of the practice; apart from creating an alliance between two households, a fosterage contract provided the child with the an extra set of kinsmen. In future life it could count not only on the assistance of the foster-father, but also on the solidarity of siblings acquired through fosterage. According to some Irish laws foster-brothers were even to share in the fine payable to relatives in the event of murder. Moreover, fostering a child from a powerful family might bring long-term rewards; hence, a high-ranking child might be fostered by consecutive parents, all eager to reap the desirable rewards. The son of a king would have many foster-parents. No wonder, then, that one of the *Lives of Patrick* has a princess ask: 'Have many fostered Christ?'<sup>82</sup>

This system was so successful that in Ireland as well as in Gaelic Scotland it persisted well into the seventeenth century. Early medieval saints' lives from Ireland and Brittany reveal that fosterage also had an ecclesiastical equivalent.<sup>83</sup> Monks or nuns functioned as foster-parents, either for a limited period in which the child retained the lay status, or forever, with the child becoming a *macclérech* (young cleric) or *maccaillech* (young nun) once it was handed over to its educator.<sup>84</sup> If the relationship was temporary it resembled any other kind of specialised training by means of being apprenticed, with the pupil being incapable of making valid contracts 'during the period of subjection to his master'. Within the ecclesiastical sphere, however, this subjection was most likely to have permanent consequences; most religious 'apprentices' left the world forever when they started a religious education.

The extent to which fosterage was institutionalised and regulated by law seems to have been peculiar to the Celtic world, but elsewhere, similar procedures can be observed. Bede's entry into monastic life is a case in point. Though usually considered a child oblate, Bede himself said that at age seven he was 'given to be educated to the venerable Abbot Benedict, and later on to Ceolfrid' (... *datus sum educandus reverentissimo abbati Benedicto, deinde Ceolfrido* ...).<sup>85</sup> The *Life of Ceolfrid* speaks of a little boy who helped the abbot to keep the monastic office going when

<sup>81</sup> Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> Kerlouegan, 'Essai sur la mise en nourriture', pp. 133-144.

<sup>84</sup> Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, p. 91.

<sup>85</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*. Cf. above, n. 9.

most of the other monks were hit by an epidemic; this boy, who was possibly Bede himself, was '*nutritus et eruditus*' by Abbot Ceolfrid.<sup>86</sup> Colgrave may have been right in his conclusion that Bede's parents' offer of their child to Benedict Biscop 'would be the equivalent of putting the boy in charge of foster-parents', very much like young Beowulf, entrusted at age seven to his maternal uncle to be raised as a warrior.<sup>87</sup> Bede became a member of a monastic community founded and supported by royal patronage, which indicates his aristocratic background,<sup>88</sup> the kinsmen who jointly decided to entrust him first to Benedict Biscop, and later to Ceolfrid, must have also been making an important political decision.<sup>89</sup>

Unlike secular fosterage, however, bringing a child up in a monastery was likely to have connotations of sacrifice and consecration going beyond the personal relationship with a clerical educator-cum-fosterparent. The monastic substitute-parent educated 'for God', first and foremost, and the majority of his charges seem to have left the world behind them once they were given into the care of a monk or nun.

#### 4. FAMILIARITAS

Early medieval educational practice was governed by distinct and yet similar customs. *Commendatio*, baptismal sponsorship and fosterage all created networks of artificial kinship which extended the apparently insufficient bonds of the natural family. In the words of contemporary

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<sup>86</sup> *Vita Ceolfridi*, c. 14, p. 393. The *puerulus* in question was possibly Bede himself, for the author described him with the following words: '... nunc usque in eodem monasterio presbyterii gradum tenens, iure actus eius laudabiles cunctis scire volentibus et scripto commendat, et fatu ...'. See above, chapter I, § 5, n. 137.

<sup>87</sup> Colgrave (ed.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. x.

<sup>88</sup> About this aspect of Wearmouth-Jarrow, see Ian N. Wood's forthcoming Jarrow lecture, 'The most holy Abbot Ceolfrid'. I am grateful to the author for making his text available to me before publication.

<sup>89</sup> Bede's expression '*cura propinquorum datus sum educandus reverentissimo abbati Benedicto, ac deinde Ceolfrido ...*' (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, V, c. 24, p. 566) may imply more than his being taken, as a matter of course, to Jarrow in Ceolfrid's wake; it may have entailed a conscious move on the part of his *propinques*, transferring their patronage from one abbot to the other.

authors, they created *familiaritas*.<sup>90</sup> The cognatic kinship structure prevailing in early medieval Western Europe may have required such additional strategies of alliance, for the double adherence to the mother's and the father's family made blood-ties at once extensive and diffuse.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, these practices flourished in early medieval states, that were held together by complicated networks of personal allegiance. In so far as royal courts served as centres of power, it was power dispensed through patronage: the authority of kings and magnates was measured by the number of those dependent upon their protection. Conversely, young scions of the aristocracy would attract a series of protectors who hoped to benefit from such an association. The son of a Merovingian aristocrat could expect to be entrusted to the king, who in turn would select another, more suitable *nutritor* for him if he had to learn skills which could not be acquired in the *aula regis*.<sup>92</sup>

This brings us to the second social function of artificial parenthood: it served as an appropriate context for specialised training not always available in a child's own household or native region. It offered a combination of material care, personal protection and training in specialised skills meant to provide a child with new opportunities. This also held true for seekers of a literary training. A child desiring to 'learn letters' could be commended to a kinsman, a bishop, an abbot, a magnate, a king or simply to a *magister*. According to the Merovingian saints' lives, most of the literary aspirants came from the aristocracy. Though one must bear in mind a preference for noble saints, such evidence cannot be entirely discounted. A literary education indeed seems to have been the hallmark of high birth, a fact which explains why *commendatio* and *eruditio* went

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<sup>90</sup> Whereas this word had a distinctly positive connotation in eighth-century hagiography, its pedigree was of a different nature. Earlier monastic authors such as Caesarius of Arles used it in a negative sense, denoting forbidden relations of those within the cloister with those outside of it. Especially spiritual parenthood was wont to create *familiaritas*, which should be avoided at all cost; see above, n. 63. To the laity, however, such familiarity with those within the domain of the sacred was valuable, a point of view which by the eighth century had evidently become acceptable to hagiographers.

<sup>91</sup> Guichard, 'De l'Antiquité au Moyen Age'; Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structures*, pp. 217-9. Cu villier, 'Peuples Germaniques et peuples romano-barbares', pp. 318-26.

<sup>92</sup> Heinzelm ann, 'Studia sanctorum', pp. 130-1. About the education of early medieval aristocratic boys, see now the excellent survey by Dette, 'Kinder und Jugendliche in der Adelsgesellschaft des frühen Mittelalters'.

so well together.<sup>93</sup> If the educator also happened to be his pupil's relative or godfather, natural and spiritual kinship provided an extra bond between *nutritor* and *nutritus*.

When hagiographers wrote of children being 'commended' to saintly abbots, they did so against the background of such strategies of artificial parenthood. To some extent, the institutionalised Irish and Anglo-Saxon concept of fosterage may have influenced continental practice; possibly Jonas referred to a specifically Irish kind of fosterage when he spoke of Gallus having been commended to Columbanus. But more likely the expressions *commendare* and *tradere* covered a multitude of relationships between an adult and a child, with personal care and protection as the common denominator. This much is clear: children from the early medieval élite tended to spend their formative years outside of the parental household. They were not so much dependant on the 'kindness of strangers' as on what amounted to a foster-family. Emotional attachment most certainly could be part of the relationship; the most telling evidence comes from Irish law, which reserves the intimate forms *muimne* (mummy) and *aite* (daddy) for the foster-parents rather than for the natural ones.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, former monastic *nutriti* spoke with great affection of the ones who had raised them; Alcuin wished to be buried among the *fratres* of York, who had brought him up with motherly affection.<sup>95</sup> Just as those growing up at the court remained the *domestici regis*, retaining their 'familiarity' with the king, those who were commended to ecclesiastical personages entered into an enduring intimacy. Liudger was educated and loved by Abbot Gregory of Utrecht 'as if he were an only son', and the same was said of Boniface's relationship to Gregory.<sup>96</sup>

Such attachment generated by artificial kinship also radiated onto the boy's kindred. Liudger's nephew and biographer Altfrid exalted the saint's

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-8.

<sup>94</sup> Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>95</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 42, pp. 85-6. Cf. the metaphorical motherhood implied in the *Vita Alcuini*, c. 1, p. 185: '... qui cum matris ablactaretur carnalibus, ecclesiae traditur mysticis imbuendus uberibus'. In Ermanricus of Ellwangen's *Sermo de vita Sualonis*, p. 161, Gundram says about his uncle Hrabanus: '... ipsa infantia mea dominus meus beatissimus abba ... genitus est patruus, ex disciplina vero pater et dominus ...'.

<sup>96</sup> Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, c. 9, p. 14: '... pro quibus et a venerabili magistri quasi filius unicus diligebatur'; Liduger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 2, p. 69.

noble Frisian family and their *familiaritas* with successive missionaries.<sup>97</sup> Liudger's *commendatio* to Gregory was apparently in keeping with family tradition, for his grandmother Adelburg had already commended her brothers Willibraht and Thiatbraht to Willibrord. As Altfrid expressed it, 'This lineage had great familiarity with St Willibrord as well as with St Boniface' ('*Habuitque progenies illa magnam familiaritatem cum sancto Willibrordo nec non et cum sancto Bonifacio*').<sup>98</sup> As Jonas' Life of Columbanus testifies, 'familiarity' with a miracle-working saint was an important asset to an illustrious family, and commending one's children to a *vir Dei* was as good a way as any of acquiring it. The tie thus created may also have extended to the kindred of the *nutritor*.

What all these stories of *commendatio* and fosterage have in common is the eminently personal nature of the relationship engendered by entrusting a child to an educator. They became attached to one another for the rest of their lives, with the former *nutritus* acknowledging his debt to his *nutritor* by writing his *vita*. Moreover, through this bond between the child and its protector a whole family was drawn into *familiaritas* with a powerful personage, be he a king, a magnate, a bishop or an abbot. This implies that the ties between a *nutritus* and his native family could not be severed, for if he stopped being a member of his kindred he could no longer play his role as a mediator between his relatives and his *nutritor*. In other words, relations of patronage – secular and spiritual – were only valuable to all parties concerned if the *nutritus* continued to be part of both worlds, thus connecting his natural to his artificial family.

In this respect Benedictine child oblation was diametrically opposed to the practice of *commendatio*. Benedict told parents to offer their child 'to God in the monastery',<sup>99</sup> in the presence of witnesses, identifying the child with the eucharistic offerings. The child was a 'whole-burnt offering' (*holocaustum*), meaning that nothing was left for greedy participants in the

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<sup>97</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 87-8; Lebecq, 'La famille et les apprentis-sages de Liudger', pp. 283-6. Altfrid was the son of Liudger's sister; of Liudger's mother Liafburg he remarked that she was saved from infanticide by divine providence, to bear Liudger and his brother Hildegim, both bishops, and daughters who in turn gave birth to bishops, i.e. their nephew Hildgrim, bishop of Halberstadt, and Altfrid himself, who became bishop of Münster. Cf. Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, c. 6, p. 10-11.

<sup>98</sup> Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, c. 5, p. 9-10; cf. Lebecq, 'La famille et les apprentis-sages de Liudger', pp. 283-6.

<sup>99</sup> *RB*, c. 59, 1; see above, chapter I, § 2.

ritual. The entire sacrifice was destined for God; hence, all ties with its family of origin were to be radically cut. The Aachen reform councils of 816/817 advocated precisely this kind of radical break with the world, propagating a sacrificial ritual orientated towards God rather than towards a mediating *nutritor*. The donation of the child was to be recorded in a document addressed 'to the name of the saints whose relics lie here and that of the abbot presently in office',<sup>100</sup> the abbot being the representative of God and his saints rather than the protector and educator of a child personally entrusted to him. This is not to say that the abbot could not assume such a role as time went by, but individual patronage certainly was not the aim of this type of oblation. Significantly, the oblation register of Rheims more often than not omitted the name of the abbot from the *petitio* altogether, concentrating instead on the child being donated to God and St Remi.<sup>101</sup> If implemented to their full extent, the Aachen regulations concerning child oblation left no room whatsoever for the traditional *familiaritas* between those giving and receiving a child. This was in keeping with the general aim of the reforming councils, which could be summed up as the separation of worlds that had become too closely entangled. The different *ordines* within the realm were to be more clearly distinguished, with monks and canons, clergy and laity all being assigned their own, separate roles within the realm. Once again, a massive attempt was made to drive the world out of the cloister. Children other than oblates were refused entry to monastic schools, inspection tours of monks in the outside world were to be severely restricted, and abbots were to give up their aristocratic life-style in the abbot's house for a humble life within their communities. Such reforms were meant to check the encroachment of aristocratic interests upon the *claustrum*; furthering child oblation according to the Rule of Benedict was just one more means of accomplishing this goal. For what could be more undermining to the seclusion of the cloister than monks and nuns who remained members of their families in the outside world? Benedict's decree on oblation and its early ninth-century elaboration were therefore entirely geared towards

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<sup>100</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, 7, p. 302: '... ad nomen sanctorum quorum hic reliquiae continentur et abbatis praesentis ...'.

<sup>101</sup> See above, chapter III, § 3. The usual expression was '... ad nomen sancti Remigii vel ad sanctorum quorum etiam hic reliquiae continentur et abbati praesenti ...'.



cutting the ties between child oblates and their families, using the child's inheritance as a safeguard of stability and enduring separation.

Given the tremendous social significance of *commendatio* and personal patronage outside as well as inside the cloister, such strategies of separation must have engendered conflict and resistance. In theory, Benedictine child oblation severed precisely those family ties which needed to remain intact if patronage were to function effectively. This underlying conflict probably explains why Benedict's precept for child oblation was absent from the seventh-century monastic rules drawing upon the *Regula Benedicti*; even sources from the milieu of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries, who held Benedict in high esteem as the *abbas Romensis*,<sup>102</sup> seem to have kept child oblation at bay. Brief references to the *oblatio puerorum* begin making their appearance in early ninth-century capitularies, but only at the Aachen councils did child oblation become the sole appropriate way for minors to enter monastic life. Instead of being commended to the patronage of a particular abbot, children were now to be donated without strings attached, and hagiography began conforming to this model. Hence, Gallus' *commendatio* changed into an *oblatio*, once Walahfrid Strabo set about rewriting his *vita*.

One may well wonder, however, whether parents donating their children in this fashion were quite prepared to accept all of its consequences. Ideally, the act of oblation was to engender a complete estrangement between the child and its original family. The tenth-century *consuetudines* of Fleury carried this principle to its extreme. Relatives were forbidden to visit a sick child, and parents were not allowed to bury their own child, for this would provide occasion for 'carnal love'.<sup>103</sup> The carnal family was replaced by a spiritual one, which completely assumed the parental role:

If one of the children falls ill, its master should grieve for it like a mother; he should place the child in the hospital with loving kindness, watching over it and providing it with all that is necessary.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Wollasch, *Benedictus abbas Romensis*.

<sup>103</sup> *Consuetudines Floriacenses*, c. 18, p. 31; in the eighth-century *Memoriale Qualiter* (p. 246), too frequent contact with relatives is said to lead to 'superfluous and secular laughter' (*superfluous vel saecularis risus*).

<sup>104</sup> *Consuetudines Floriacenses*, c. 18, p. 31: 'Si forte aliquis infantum infirmatur, acsi mater dolet super illo magister atque cum omni affectione humanitatis collocat eum in infirmorio providens eum atque necessaria queque amministrans'.

Harshly rejecting all manifestations of 'carnal love', the Fleury customs nonetheless recognised the oblates' need for loving care, but it was the new, spiritual family that should do the mothering, while the carnal parents were excluded. In practice, however, monks and nuns deviated from this rigid ideal. Ekkehard's *Casus sancti Galli* contains the intriguing story of Wolo, a young monk unable to bear the confinement of the cloister and the constraints of monastic discipline. Ekkehard accounted for his restless and uncontrollable nature by pointing out that most young aristocrats were strong-willed, and related how Wolo's worried parents were called to St Gall to take matters in hand. But their reprimand had only limited effect, for as soon as they left their son reverted to his former behaviour.<sup>105</sup> This story of monks being at their wits' end and appealing to a boy's parents is no less 'real' than the attitude prevailing the customs of Fleury: these were the two extremes between which child oblates lived their lives. Parental concern was the common denominator in both stories, for the fathers and mothers eager to visit their sick children or to bury their dead ones were no less concerned (*solliciti*) with their offspring than Wolo's parents who rushed to St Gall to plead with their son. What did vary was the stance of religious communities, ranging from total rejection of the natural parents to engaging them actively in disciplining their child.

The opposition between these extremes is one of the enduring themes in medieval monastic life. On the one hand parents represented the world which the oblate should leave behind, while on the other they themselves became the *familiares* of the monastery or convent to which they had donated their offspring. A further exploration of this area of tension may get us somewhat closer to answering the most difficult and controversial question in the history of child oblation: what did parents hope to gain from donating their sons and daughters 'to God in the monastery?'

## 5. SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL KINSHIP

As we have seen, recent research on child oblation has opted for two diametrically answers to this question, stressing economic and 'rational' motives on the one hand, and the alterity of early medieval religion on

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<sup>105</sup> Ekkehard, *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 43, pp. 96-8. Cf. Haefele, 'Wolo cecidit', who interprets Wolo's subsequent fall from the bell-tower as a suicide.

the other.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the parents' overt religious motivation suggested by early medieval sources is either treated as the pious sauce to a rather calculating dish, or as an expression of the 'formally cultic' nature of early medieval religion.

There is much to be said against both of these interpretations. All the evidence shows, in refutation of the economic necessity thesis, that oblates were predominantly aristocratic children who brought their inheritance with them to the monastery. Moreover, whereas infanticide, abortion and birth control did occur in early medieval societies, natural child mortality wiped out many dearly longed-for children. Families rarely grew beyond the parents' ability to support all children. Judging by prayers and masses aiding fertility, and stories of saints intervening to procure conception, lack of legitimate offspring seems to have presented at least as much of a problem as unwanted pregnancies. As for the fundamental otherness of child oblation, this aspect is likely to be over-emphasised if the monastic discourse of separation is taken at face value. As hagiography testifies, relinquishing all ties with the family indeed was the essence of *conversio* and religious life from late antiquity onwards. The *topos* of the monk refusing to meet his mother or only agreeing to speak to her with closed eyes persisted well into the early middle ages, along with that of child oblates falling ill when visiting their parents.<sup>107</sup> But between the lines of such hagiographical conventions active connections between saints and their families remained in effect. In fact, they appear to have been so strong that the whole idea of children being 'abandoned' by being destined for monastic life must be discarded. To the contrary: while gaining a spiritual family within the cloister, they remained closely linked to their original kin, who more often than not were depicted as supportive of their religious endeavour.

When Liudger insisted on going to York for a second period of study with Alcuin, his spiritual father Abbot Gregory enlisted the help of his

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<sup>106</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, chooses the former point of departure, while Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*, opts for the latter. See above, Introduction.

<sup>107</sup> Borias, 'Le moine et sa famille'; Steidle, 'Das Wiedersehen des Mönches mit Mutter und Schwester', pp. 11-3; Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Johannis*, c. 6, p. 509; idem, *Vita Columbani*, II, c. 5, pp. 117-8, in which Jonas describes how he himself fell ill during a long-delayed visit home, getting better again as soon as he returned to Bobbio; Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, II, c. 24, 1-2, vol. II, p. 210: '... quidam suos puerulus monachus, parentes suos ultra quam debebat diligens ...'.

carnal one, calling in Liudger's father Thiadgrim to help persuade his son against going. Thiadgrim failed to convince Liudger, who cheerfully went off to York against the advice of both his spiritual and carnal father.<sup>108</sup> Up to this point the story is hardly remarkable, for by travelling to York in the face of resistance young Liudger stayed well within the framework of hagiographical conventions: all earthly ties were to be severed in order to liberate oneself for the ascetic *peregrinatio*. Its curious aspect lies in the two fathers joining forces to keep their son at home, with the spiritual father being equally cast in the role of the familial force opposing Liudger's spiritual destiny. According to Liudger's biographer Altfrid two spiritual fathers vied for his loyalty. When Liudger had studied with Alcuin for over three years, he was compelled to leave York because his life was endangered by a feud. A Frisian merchant had murdered the son of a local count, so as a Frisian Liudger ran the risk of becoming the victim of a vendetta. Alcuin immediately set about smuggling him out of town, saying 'that he would rather die himself than allow his beloved son to come to any lethal harm here'.<sup>109</sup>

Padberg viewed this episode as a further sign of the victory of spiritual kinship over carnal ties, especially since Alcuin's loyalty to Liudger apparently prevailed over his solidarity with the local 'party'.<sup>110</sup> But could it not be that the bond between spiritual father and son became as strong as ordinary family ties? In describing Gregory, Thiadgrim and Alcuin competing for Liudger's loyalty, Altfrid put these three fathers on a par. He depicted Liudger's forbears as long-standing allies of missionaries and Carolingian rulers, enjoying *magna familiaritas* with Willibrord and Boniface.<sup>111</sup> The family's support of Frisia's christianisation was clearly a collective effort, and so it remained in Liudger's time. Liudger's brother Hildegim became his disciple, joining him on a pilgrimage to Rome, while their sister Heriburg became abbess of his first religious foundation in Nottuln.<sup>112</sup> Liudger himself remained in control of his

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<sup>108</sup> Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, cc. 10-11, pp. 15-6.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 12, p. 17: 'Dicebat enim potius se velle mori, quam ut filius suus dilectus illic quicquam pateretur loetalis mali'.

<sup>110</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>111</sup> Lebecq, 'La famille et les apprentissages de Liudger', pp. 283-6.

<sup>112</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, p. 87.

heritage, for the monastery of Werden was erected *in hereditate sua*.<sup>113</sup> Liudger's *vita* of his spiritual father Gregory reveals similar family solidarity. When Gregory's two half-brothers were killed, the fate of their two murderers was put in his hands. Instead of having them killed he decided to set them free, thus procuring the salvation of his half-brothers.<sup>114</sup> This is a tale of Christian forgiveness, but also one of an abbot who was responsible for avenging the murder of his kinsmen, having apparently become the head of his family after his father's death.

In these saints' lives engendered by the Anglo-Saxon mission it is not a matter of young monks or nuns having to choose between spiritual and carnal kinship. The two in fact went together very well. Next to descriptions of *peregrinatio* as resulting from a contentious break with the family we find instances in which the ascetic voyage was a collective family affair. Lull, Boniface's kinsman and successor to the see of Mainz went on a pilgrimage to Rome 'with the whole of his kindred' (*cum totius propinquitatis*).<sup>115</sup> Likewise, after settling as a monk in Rome the Anglo-Saxon Wynnebald voyaged to his native country, wondering whether he could recruit 'anyone of his lineage' (*ullum de sua genealogia*) for the service of God on the continent.<sup>116</sup> Remarkably, his – successful – attempt to enlist others to the cause was directed exclusively at his *propinqui et cognati*, or such at least was the way in which his kinswoman Hugeburc presented the venture.

The very authorship of hagiographical works reveals the ongoing importance of family ties, for many hagiographers were not only spiritual children but also blood relatives of their subjects. Altfrid was Liudger's second successor to the see of Münster and his kinsman, and Eigil was Sturm's spiritual son and relative. The succession to episcopal and abbatial

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<sup>113</sup> Altfrid, *Vita prima Liudgeri*, c. 27, p. 32: 'Alio quoque tempore dum esset beatus Liudgerus secus mare in loco, qui vocatur Werthina, ubi ipse sibi hereditate paterna construxit aecclesiam, terribile vidit somnium, quod narrans Heriburgae sorori suae dixit ...'.

<sup>114</sup> Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 9, p. 74. Cf. Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 97-8, esp. n. 495.

<sup>115</sup> Boniface (and Lull), *Epistolae*, no. 98, p. 219; cf. *ibid.*, no. 49, pp. 78-80. In the second letter Lullus asked Abbess Cuniburga to send two boys named Begiloc and Man, former slaves of his family, to the continent as recruits for his clergy.

<sup>116</sup> Hugeburc of Heidenheim, *Vita Wynnebaldi*, c. 3, p. 108: 'Cumque, transactis temporum intervallis et 7 annorum curriculis, mens illius heri agilis Saxoniam iterum propriae nativitatis terram visitare volebat, et ob hoc precipue, ut si ullum de sua genealogia ad sacro divini servitutis militio exortare atque secum ducere poterat'.

office followed the same pattern.<sup>117</sup> In this context, the father-son relation between educator and disciple has been stressed, ensuring continuity according to the model of Christ and his apostles.<sup>118</sup> But apparently carnal kinship increased the likelihood of apostolic succession, for the successors of Wilfrid, Gregory, Liudger, Wynnebald, Boniface and Sturm were all blood relations. Though familial succession was customary in Irish and Anglo-Saxon monasteries, it does not account for Gregory, Liudger and Sturm electing kinsmen to succeed them in office. The so-called *Eigenkirche*, based on familial solidarity, was a universal phenomenon in early medieval societies. As earlier continental hagiography shows, aristocrats had been eager to procure a stake in the sacred long before the Anglo-Saxon mission got under way, and one way of doing so was by commending their children to saints. In Burgundofara's case Jonas played down her allegiance to her aristocratic family by a dramatic story of her father opposing her vocation, but that should not blind us to the fact that she became abbess of Faremoutiers, a convent founded on family property; her brother Chagnoald, bishop of Laon, helped her organise her community. Bishop Burgundofaro of Meaux was probably also her brother; he figures in Burgundofara's will, along with her brother Chagnulf who was count of Meaux and an otherwise unknown sister Agnetrade.<sup>119</sup> With three out of five children entering the church, around the beginning of the seventh century an ecclesiastical career obviously was a respectable power base for this Burgundo-Frankish aristocratic family. The same held true for their northern counterparts a century or so later, when nobles 'started to offer their children' to Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

By doing so, they did not intend to sever all ties with their offspring. Some parents tried to retain control over the destiny of oblates, reclaiming them at a later stage when a good opportunity for marriage arose. Hagiographers most often related such stories in the context of the saint's conflict with his or her family, but they were not only making this up for the sake of hagiographical discourse. From the days of Caesarius of Arles onwards, convents had been faced with parents treating religious institutions like finishing schools. Obviously Boniface came up against similar problems, for he enquired of Pope Gregory II whether parents could be allowed to marry off children they had once donated to God. No,

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<sup>117</sup> Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 129-40.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-119.

<sup>119</sup> Ebling, 'Burgundofarones'; Ewig, 'Volkstum und Volksbewusstsein', pp. 255-8.

they could not, replied Gregory, for it would be sacrilege if children offered to God were to give in to lust.<sup>120</sup> All the same, this remained a common occurrence, as is clear from Smaragdus' dry comment on Benedict's Rule. In Benedict's days oblates deserting the monastery had been few and far between, he said, 'but we know that nowadays this happens very often'.<sup>121</sup> There is no proof, however, that such fugitives were necessarily fleeing into the arms of women. They may have wished to pursue a clerical career outside of the cloister, making good use of the literary skills they acquired in their youth. In any event, they needed the protection of kinsmen or patrons once they escaped the monastery. Gottschalk's *cause célèbre* is a case in point, for he clearly enjoyed the backing of his *propinqui*.

Parents or other relatives were wont to change their minds, therefore, but even if they adhered staunchly to their original intentions their oblate children seem to have remained part of the family. This was inevitable if the family as a whole was to enjoy the benefits of their gift, just as they had enjoyed the advantages of *commendatio* or spiritual kinship. It was not only a matter of aristocratic child oblates being predestined to high ecclesiastical positions, thus adding to the status and power of their kindred. There were also spiritual benefits involved, for the child served as a mediator between his family and the sacred. It could only do so by belonging to both worlds at the same time, and the parents could only really profit from the act of oblation by holding on to their child while giving it away.

## 6. KEEPING WHILE GIVING

This brings us once more to the nature of the ritual of child oblation. As presented by the Rule of Benedict and its commentaries, it should be classified as a rite of sacrifice; its dynamics were geared towards transforming the child into a consecrated offering, transporting it to the domain of the sacred. The transition was immediate and irrevocable. Unlike the profession ritual for adult novices, these children did not need any transitory period to cleanse them from the pollution inherent in having lived in 'the world'; on the contrary, they went from the innocence of

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<sup>120</sup> Boniface, *Epistolae*, no. 26, p. 46.

<sup>121</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 301.

childhood to the innocence of the cloister by way of being brought into physical contact with the altar. A rhetoric of separation grew around child oblation, emphasising the oblate's complete severance from the world outside. Hence, hagiographers told stories of children falling ill when visiting their former home, and of toddler oblates fiercely withstanding parental efforts to thwart their sacred destiny.

But what of the parents who gave away their child? Although their voices are rarely heard directly in the sources, their continued interest in their offspring shows through. In some cases emotional ties with their child seem to have been sufficiently strong to warrant parental intervention if monks did not succeed in disciplining a wayward oblate; in a similar vein, religious communities were faced with parents wishing to nurse their children if they were sick, and to bury them if they died. More important, however, was the child's position as a mediator between the donors and the sacred. In order to fulfil this role properly, the oblate had to remain a member of its family of origin, guaranteeing their enduring *familiaritas* with the religious community it had entered. Registration of the kind practised in Rheims confirmed both the separation of child oblates from the world *and* the acceptance of their relatives into the community of benefactors and *familiares* of the monastery: the pages of the register contained the names of all those involved in the gift of a child, including a precise description of their family connection to the oblate in question. Within the aristocracy, abbatial or episcopal successions by family members could ensure further continuity of connections with religious institutions, and some families even seem to have selected a specific name for the child that was destined to take the place of a 'monastic' relative: hence, a series of Notkers and Ekkehards inhabited St Gall. By donating a child, one opened a channel to the sacred, by placing a member of one's family as closely as possible to the locus of supernatural power.

Such relations were not fundamentally different from those which governed *commendatio* to kings or courtiers. Having a child brought up in the *aula regis* would establish an alliance with the mighty; likewise, donating a child 'to God in the monastery' created an enduring link between his or her family and the sacred. In both cases, the child belonged to two different worlds at the same time, a situation fraught with mutual profit as well as conflict. But the likelihood of both worlds being at loggerheads was greater when an *oblatio* was involved, however, for in this case the balance of power shifted inexorably towards the receiving party. This, at least, was the opinion of the religious communities receiving these children. Spiritual and existential motives coincided in the



monks' emphasis on child oblation as irretrievable *holocaustum*, for after all, their very survival depended on such new recruits to monastic life. In addition, most of them had entered the cloister precisely in this fashion, and were therefore inclined to take a dim view of any disruption of the *stabilitas* they lived by.

With the spread of Benedictine child oblation, the focus of conflict tended to be the child's inheritance. Once this had been handed over to a religious community, fugitive oblates had a much harder time making a life for themselves in the world outside. Where did all those that Smaragdus spoke of find refuge, once they left the monastery? Gottschalk, unable to retrieve his lands, found patronage and recognition at the court of Count Eberhard of Friuli, and he probably was not the only one forced to use his monastic learning as means of survival. Whoever left the protection of the spiritual family needed the assistance of kinsmen or patrons. Lambert and his father Atho also battled to regain control of family property, going as far as taking their case to Pope Nicholas himself. Father and son got entrapped by the irrevocable consequences of a proper child oblation, something they had not bargained for when Atho made his young son a monk. By doing so, he hoped to ensure his son's succession to the abbacy, but the ultimate result was disastrous, for the monks of Schienen now contended that Lambert could not own the monastery as his father had done in his capacity as a lay abbot. By the second half of the ninth century the oblation ritual had become so established that Lambert and his father had to resort to claiming that Lambert had not been offered properly at the altar with bread and wine.

Parents donating children also intended to keep them, while religious communities attempted to incorporate oblates in a spiritual family, separating them from their carnal ties. This tension underlies most early medieval pronouncements on child oblation. If familial and monastic purposes coincided, as they did in the case of *Eigenklöster*, hagiographers replaced the theme of conflict by one of a Christian *progenies* enjoying familiarity with the sacred. But if family policy was thwarted by monks and nuns hanging on for dear life to their spiritual children, the *topos* of the young saint fighting his father and mother might crop up again with a vengeance. There seems to have been an upsurge of this rhetoric of separation when royal and monastic authority joined forces against aristocratic families and their stake in the sacred. After all, royal monasteries were crucial in supporting the power of the Carolingian monarchs; to a large extent, the rise of the Carolingians was due to their being more successful than other aristocrats in controlling these vital resources.

Severing monks and nuns from their original kindred could be a powerful weapon in the fight against competing families to gain and maintain control of religious institutions, for it effectively neutralised the competition's stake in the sacred. As the Carolingian grip on religious institutions became firmer, monastic discourse stressing the opposition between *claustrum* and *saeculum* grew noticeably more vociferous, leaving little room for personal ties between families and the monks and nuns to whom they had commended their offspring. Instead, a model aiming at a total break between the child and its family was enforced: Benedictine child oblation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CHILD OBLATION AND THE STATE

#### 1. THE SCHOOL OF THE LORD'S SERVICE

To later historians, child oblation's coercive nature has been its most puzzling and controversial aspect. Why did parents have the right to make a profession for their children, forcing them to devote the rest of their lives to God's service? Answers to this question have varied widely, ranging from the legal to the economic domain. Benedict's strict views on the irrevocability of parental vows have been explained in terms of the Roman *patria potestas*, which gave the father an unlimited right to determine the life of his children.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the fact that Benedict was no legal scholar writing a judicial text, this interpretation is wildly anachronistic: by Benedict's time, the classical *patria potestas* was a thing of the distant past. Alternatively, the pious donation of a child has been depicted as a socially acceptable way of disposing of one's offspring, the religious aspects being no more than a thin disguise for its actual incentive: economic hardship. Given that Carolingian legislators had to warn parents against effectively disinheriting their offspring by donating all their wealth to the church,<sup>2</sup> the 'economic' explanation of child oblation also seems improbable.

These explanations, however disparate, do not take into account the fact that personal liberty may not have carried the same meaning in different societies and periods. Moreover, they leave out one particularly important aspect, considering child oblation's coercive nature: the impact of royal power and the early state we call the 'Carolingian Empire' upon the internal life of monastic communities. After all, who was to stop oblates from leaving their monastery if, even after a careful education under *custodia and disciplina*, they opted for another kind of life? Many

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<sup>1</sup> Seidl, *Die Gott-Verlobung*, pp. 179-179; Deroux, *Les origines*, pp. 'Les origines de l'oblature bénédictine', p. 15; Becker, 'Oblatio puerorum', col. 1170; Jacobs, *Die Regula Benedicti als Rechtsbuch*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (a. 818/819), c. 7, MGH Capit. I, no. 138, p. 277. Cf. Schmitz, 'Capitulary Legislation', pp. 426-7.

of them may indeed have done so without leaving any trace in written records, but the few known cases of conflict clearly show that public power had a vested interest in the matter. Having been judged by a synod, Gottschalk's case was referred to the emperor himself, while Lambert appealed to Pope Nicholas in order to contravene episcopal jurisdiction. Coercion evidently was part of monastic life, oblates being incarcerated rather than expelled if their behaviour seemed to endanger regular life. Such prison-like conditions could only exist if monastic stability was reinforced by the 'strong arm' of a state.

Obviously, the Carolingian Empire was not a state in the modern sense of the word. It was an early state, 'ramshackle, held together by a thousand personalised special arrangements'.<sup>3</sup> Amongst the personalised arrangements supporting this ramshackle state, monasteries and nunneries held pride of place. The Merovingians already had their royal monasteries, but the Carolingian monarchs came to rely on their *monasteria* to a far greater extent than their predecessors had done. As mayors of the palace they had operated like any other magnates eager to promote the interests of their families through the endowment and control of religious houses. Gradually, however, they managed for some four generations to squeeze out other aristocrats from the competition, effectively checking the efforts of other noble families to use monasteries as building blocks for independent power. Only in the 880s did the royal monopoly of monasteries become seriously threatened again, with lay lords assuming control of monastic resources.

The domination of Carolingian monarchs over monasteries has often been interpreted in terms of purely economic and political interest. But royal concern with monastic wealth was inspired by an equally vested interest in the continuity and regularity of prayer. Monastic *regularitas* was predicated upon landed property, for this enabled the mediators to devote themselves to their sacred duties. Communal poverty endangered the regularity of prayer as well as the stability of the realm, and so it was the king's duty to be 'a comforter of churches and holy monasteries with the greatest piety of royal munificence'.<sup>4</sup> This is precisely how

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> This is how the royal blessing-prayer '*Prosperice*' formulated the king's position vis-à-vis the church: '... consolator ecclesiarum atque coenobiorum sanctorum maxima cum pietate regalis munificentiae ...'; Nelson, 'Kingship and empire', p. 58. The prayer was probably composed during the reign of Charlemagne, and incorporated into the rite of royal consecration. Cf. Bouman, *Sacring and Crowning*, pp. 90-4;

Carolingian kings envisaged and presented themselves. To be sure, they also used monastic property to reward their *fideles*, appointing lay abbots and converting church land into precarial grants for their retainers. Such practices occasionally engendered controversy and ecclesiastical censure.<sup>5</sup> All the same, religious establishments rightly viewed royalty as their main benefactor, expecting it to safeguard the economic basis of prayer. Royal control of ecclesiastical wealth therefore did not necessarily conflict with royal support of the regularity of monastic life. Lay abbots only became objectionable when they made inroads into the *mensa fratrum*; likewise, as long as the material continuity of religious communities remained ensured, kings converting monastic land into precarial grants were a generally accepted phenomenon.

Monastic property and prayer were therefore of equal importance to the Carolingian state. Royal authority was supported by the daily prayer for the ruler, his children and the entire Christian people (*populus Christianus*).<sup>6</sup> However much Hildemar attempted to emphasise the differences between Benedict's *schola dominici servitii* and its human counterpart, he presented them as two sides of the same coin:

He [Benedict] has rightly said *divini servitii*, for there also is that other school of human service; and there is a great difference between the school of divine and human service. In the school of human service men fight for the king, learning the art of warfare and hunting and all those things belonging to an honourable life in the world, and they constantly keep their eye on this, for which reason they put up with all kinds of evil, such as famine and tribulation and similar things. Conversely, those in the school of divine service fight for the heavenly king and learn about the salvation of their soul, and direct their spiritual eye towards heavenly beatitude, for which they put up with tribulations and all

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Ewig, 'Zum christlichen Königsgedanken', p. 45. Nelson, 'Kingship and empire', p. 57, rightly calls it 'an epitome of Frankish expectations of their king'.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the livid treatise composed in by bishops in Aachen against Pippin of Aquitaine, denouncing his spoliation of church property: *Epistola concilii Aquisgranensis* (a. 836), MGH Conc. II, 2, pp. 725-767. As Collins has suggested, this incident may have had 'distinctly secular overtones', for Pippin's inability to make precarial grants would limit his political support. Precarial grants were nothing out of the ordinary; moreover, Pippin had an excellent record as a benefactor of the churches in his realm. See Collins, 'Pippin I and the Kingdom of Aquitaine', pp. 370-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Supplex Libellus*, c. 1, p. 321; Ewig, 'Die Gebetsdienst der Kirche'.

adversity. Because many do not perceive this beatitude, they return to the world, being unable to support any adversity on God's behalf.<sup>7</sup>

This vision fitted in well with a society in which the court and the cloister were intricately bound together, and religious institutions had their 'place and order' (*locus et ordo*) within the various *ordines* of the realm. Children leaving royal monasteries to return to the world did more than flout parental authority or infringe upon solemn vows. As Hrabanus explained to Louis the Pious, they also undermined the foundations of monasticism itself, while depriving the ruler of his rightful patrimony.

In any discussion of early medieval child oblation's coercive nature, therefore, the connection between monastic stability and royal power should receive due consideration. Monasteries were spiritual power-houses mediating between God, from whom all power ultimately derived, and mankind which stood constantly in need of correction. Their constant worship was as indispensable to the well-being of the realm as their economic resources. In other words, monastic stability was part and parcel of public order, and so was child oblation, for the children reared within the cloister embodied that very *stabilitas*. The continuity of prayer which 'stabilised' the realm depended on a conscript army prepared to honour the vows of *oboedientia* and *stabilitas* their parents or relatives had made on their behalf. But there were other ways in which monasteries supported the equilibrium of the Carolingian political order. Being called upon to perform their liturgical tasks more correctly, on the basis of a more solid knowledge of 'canonical books', monasteries ended up taking care of the formation of a literate elite for kings in need of counsellors, emissaries, exegetes, administrators or educators for their children. Moreover, royal monasteries served as holding pens for public penitents, political opponents, rebellious princes

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<sup>7</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, prol., p. 66: 'Bene dixit *divini servitii*, quia est et alia schola humani servitii; magna enim differentia est inter scholam divini servitii et humani. In schola etenim humani servitii militant homines regi et discunt genera bellorum et genera venationum et omnia, quae ad honestatem cultus saeculi attinent, et intuentur qualicumque oculo illi aliquid, ob quod tolerant mala omnia, id est famem, tribulationem et caetera his similia. Ita econtrario isti in schola dominici servitii militant regi coelesti et discunt salutem animae suae, et intuentur oculo spiritali coelestem beatitudinem, ob quam sustinent tribulationes et omnia mala. Unde quia non vident multi hanc beatitudinem, ideo revertuntur ad saeculum, et non possunt (propter Deum) sustinere aliquid mali'.

and downright criminals. Child oblates shared the monastic precincts with a motley crowd of adults who had entered the community under duress themselves, a fact which should be taken into account when assessing the objectionable irrevocability of child oblation. Both adult monks and child oblates were conscripts, while volunteers were few and far between.

However, the traditional ideal of voluntary entry into religious life never disappeared completely: in spite of an army of child oblates and unwilling monastic prisoners, the model of personal *conversio* remained intact. Similarly, religious houses strove to retain a modicum of internal isolation and peace, while attempting to fulfil their new role as training centres for an intellectual elite. These persistent tensions within monastic life will be explored in the rest of this chapter.

## 2. THE FORMATION OF AN ELITE: *SCHOLASTICI*

Not all children who were raised in monasteries and convents were child oblates. From the days of Caesarius of Arles onwards, it had been necessary to keep parents from treating religious communities as a convenient place to have their children educated; especially nunneries were singled out for that purpose, sometimes even where boys were concerned. Nonetheless, the odd lay child found its way into the cloister; sons and daughters of kings in particular received the privilege of a monastic education.<sup>8</sup> Bernard of Italy (d. 818), for example, studied Scripture in Fulda in his boyhood, but returned as a young man to the court of his uncle, Louis the Pious.<sup>9</sup> The numbers of lay *nutriti* cannot have been very large; where boys were concerned, the main body of extra-mural trainees raised in the cloister came from the ranks of the secular clergy. Bishop Salomo I of Konstanz (d. 877) made his young relative Waldo a *clericus* and entrusted him as such to a schoolmaster in St Gall.<sup>10</sup> Waldo, who subsequently was sent to Bishop Witgar of Augsburg for further training, never became a monk. Likewise, a

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<sup>8</sup> McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 216-23.

<sup>9</sup> *Epistolarum Fuldensium fragmenta*, c. 1, p. 517; Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1017.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. a letter of his successor and kinsman Salomo II, dating from 878-879, in which he entrusted Waldo for further education to his colleague, Bishop Witgar of Augsburg; *Collectio Sangallensis*, no. 24, pp. 409-10.

nephew of Hrabanus Maurus named Gundram, raised as a secular cleric in Fulda's 'silence of the cloister', went afterwards to live at the court. He made his profession in Fulda only at a later age, and eventually became one of the community's priest-monks.<sup>11</sup>

These two individual careers reflect a blurring of boundaries between secular clerics and monks that had become quite common from the early eighth century onwards. The word *monasterium* could denote a community of monks (or nuns) living under a rule as well as a group of communally living secular clerics. Both shared a central task and a way of life: prayer and the *vita communis*. Many of those who, according to their own lights, belonged to the so-called monastic order (*ordo monasticus*) were in fact part of the cathedral clergy, or of communities founded by bishops to take charge of pastoral care in the less accessible regions of their large dioceses.<sup>12</sup> Willibrord's *monasterium* in Utrecht is a case in point.<sup>13</sup> From the sixth century onwards, bishops were recruited from monastic communities, founding convents and monasteries in their dioceses and combining the episcopal and abbatial offices. Therefore, a sharp distinction between contemplative monasticism on the one hand and active secular clergy on the other is anachronistic.

The court also figured largely in the careers of Carolingian churchmen; an educational sojourn in the *aula regis* seems to have been necessary for those aiming at ecclesiastical power.<sup>14</sup> Court and cloister served as interconnected locations of training, and trainees went from one place to the other without crossing any real boundaries. Einhard was the product of these interlocking worlds. Having been brought up in Fulda, he was sent to Charlemagne's court when Abbot Baugulf spotted his many talents. Though he was a married layman until his retirement in 830 to his monastic foundation in Seligenstadt,<sup>15</sup> he remained deeply

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<sup>11</sup> Ermanricus of Ellwangen, *Sermo de vita Sualonis*, c. 10, p. 161; see about this text Padberg, *Heilige und Familie*, pp. 53-5. About Gundram, cf. also Sandmann, 'Wirkungsbereiche fuldischer Mönche', p. 761.

<sup>12</sup> Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters'; Thacker, 'Monks, preaching and pastoral care'; De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', pp. 27-9.

<sup>13</sup> Angenendt, 'Willibrord im Dienst der Karolinger', pp. 64-85; idem, 'Willibald zwischen Mönchtum und Bischofsamt'.

<sup>14</sup> For the Merovingian period, see Heinzelmann, '*Studia sanctorum*'; for the Carolingian court, see McKitterick, 'The palace school of Charles the Bald'; eadem, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 211-70.

<sup>15</sup> Fleckenstein, 'Einhard'.



involved in monasticism. As a courtier and royal counsellor he received the abbacy of St Peter in Ghent and several others as benefices, a task to which he devoted himself very seriously.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, he was one of the central figures in the 816/817 reforms, which aimed at separating the various orders (*ordines*) in the realm.<sup>17</sup> The drawing of clear distinctions between cloister and world, as well as between monks and secular clergy, lay at the heart of the reformers' endeavour. *Monachi* were to live according to the Rule of Benedict, while *clerici canonici* should follow the rule drawn up especially for them by the Aachen council of 816. 'Let no layman or secular cleric be received in the monastery to live unless he wishes to be a monk', warned the council of 817.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, this capitulary prohibited any schools *in monasterio* for others than child oblates.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, some legislative walls were being put up against the steady flow of temporary inhabitants filling the monasteries. Their rising number has often been connected with Charlemagne's persistent attempts to give the clergy as a whole a better training; according to his famous letter *De litteris colendis*, written between 780 and 800 to Abbot Baugulf, correspondence from monks and secular clergy alike had been found wanting in style and content, and the emperor feared for their understanding of Scripture.<sup>20</sup> Monasteries as well as bishoprics were singled out to provide the necessary training – surely not as a prototype of universal education, but to ensure that those involved in the *Opus Dei* would know how to perform the liturgy.<sup>21</sup> The practical implications of this royal policy can be found in the statutes of Bishop Theodulf of Orléans (d. 821), who granted all priests in his diocese the right to send their young relatives to the *scola*

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<sup>16</sup> Felten, *Äbte und Laienäbte*, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Geuenich, 'Gebetsgedanken und Anianische Reform', pp. 88-93.

<sup>18</sup> Council of Aachen (817) c. 2, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 473: 'Ut nullus plebeius aut clericus secularis in monasterio recipiatur ad habitandum nisi voluerit fieri monachus'.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 5, p. 474: 'Ut scola in monasterio non habeatur nisi eorum qui oblatis sunt'.

<sup>20</sup> *Epistola de litteris colendis*, MGH Capit. I, p. 79. See Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 55-6 and the literature mentioned here.

<sup>21</sup> *Epistola de litteris colendis*, MGH Capit. I, p. 79: '... ut, qui Deo placere appetunt recte vivendo, ei etiam placere non negligant recte loquendo'.

of one of the many monasteries over which he exercised control.<sup>22</sup> Charlemagne's directives may thus indeed have encouraged young secular clerics to seek a monastic education, but the growing administrative structures and literate culture of the Carolingian empire must have provided an even stronger incentive. Given the fluid nature of the boundaries between abbeys, bishoprics and the court, nothing was more natural than that all these institutions should serve as a training ground for *litterati* who were destined for some form of royal service, be it as monks, secular clerics or courtiers. On a modest scale, the Carolingian age witnessed a phenomenon that would manifest itself more fully in the twelfth century: royal courts were using the written word, to such an extent that a class of professional literate clergy could readily find employment in the king's service, thus giving opportunities to social climbers. When dealing with the ninth century, however, 'royal service' should be interpreted very broadly indeed; it was as likely to entail being conscripted as a *missus dominicus* as writing biblical commentary for rulers in the quiet of one's monastic cell.<sup>23</sup>

This was the background to a concerted effort on the part of the Aachen reformers to safeguard the cloister against the many intrusions of the outside world, a concern that in the years 812-816 also inspired Fulda's desperate supplications to be granted sufficient peace for prayer.<sup>24</sup> The *saeculum* was impinging in all kinds of ways on the *claustrum*; this provoked a series of coordinated measures aimed at disentangling both spheres, of which the decree against monastic schools being open to extra-mural students was only one aspect. As is clear from the so-called *Statuta Murbacensia*, debate was rife in 816. A decision about novices had already been reached, the anonymous wrote, 'but we do not yet have a precept of the synod concerning the reception of priests or students and therefore we will carry out their reception as regularly as possible, until we learn of a more articulate decree on these

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<sup>22</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare I*, c. 19, pp. 115-6: 'Si quis ex presbyteris voluerit nepotem suum aut aliquem consanguineum ad scolam mittere, in ecclesia sanctae Crucis aut in monasterio sancti Aniani aut in sancti Benedicti aut sancti Liferdi aut in ceteris de his coenobiis, quae nobis ad regendum concessa sunt, ei licentiam id faciendi concedimus'.

<sup>23</sup> De Jong, 'Old law and new-found power'.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the so-called *Supplex Libellus*, the petition offered by the community to Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, CCM I, pp. 321-7; Semmler, 'Studien zum *Supplex Libellus*'; De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', pp. 647-51.

matters'.<sup>25</sup> Apparently, newcomers to the monastery were divided into three categories: novices, priests and *scholastici*.

Who were these *scholastici*? Their identity is revealed elsewhere in the report as the intellectual *élite* of the community which should be trained to speak Latin as often as possible in order to deepen their understanding of Scripture. Their education was demanding, and aimed at familiarising them thoroughly with the whole of monastic tradition; first, they learned the psalms and hymns by heart and then the complete text of the Rule, followed by intensive study of Scripture, biblical commentaries, patristic writing and saints' lives.<sup>26</sup> This extensive curriculum would take years to complete, as opposed to the few basic items of knowledge expected of 'those who converted from the lay state': these adult novices only learned the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and a few penitential psalms by heart, and, if they were up to it, the rest of the Psalter.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the priests and the *scholastici* were grouped together on account of their learning, while very little was required of those who converted in adulthood without having received any prior literate education. The curriculum envisaged for the *scholastici* was of a thoroughly monastic kind, devised for those that were headed for life in the cloister, the *pueri oblati* first and foremost. On the other hand, young secular clerics such as the aforementioned Waldo and Gundram also profited from such an education; they were both trained as monks, in spite of the fact that neither of them was a child oblate.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Statuta Murbacensia* c. 20, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, p. 447: 'De sacerdotibus vero vel scolasticis suscipiendis preceptum synodi non habemus; et ideo susceptio eorum regularis quantum possibilitas sinit habeatur, usquedum decretum manifestius inde audiatur'.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2, p. 442. Cf. also the epilogue to the *Statuta*, p. 449, about the use of Latin by the *scholastici* in daily life: 'Usum latinitatis potius quam rusticitatis qui inter eos scolastici sunt sequuntur. In tali etenim confabulatione notitia scripturarum aliquoties magis quam lectione penetratur et dictandi usus discitur et ad discendum sensus acuitur'.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2, p. 442: 'Qui vero de habitu seculari conversi notitia litterarum indigent, post earum cognitionem orationem dominicam et symbolum et sic deinceps paenitentium psalmos, post haec reliquos, usquedum vita et virtus suppetit, discere non desinant'.

<sup>28</sup> About Gundram, see above, n. 46. Waldo was raised '... sub artissima disciplina et custodia litterarum studiis monasterialibusque rudimentis insistent ...'; *Collectio Sangallensis*, no. 24, p. 410.

All the evidence points to oblates and clerics being educated together and receiving similar training. Much has been made of the so-called 'external schools', which were supposedly preserving monastic seclusion while also catering to the educational needs of the outside world.<sup>29</sup> The only known example of an external school, however, comes from St Gall. Its famous plan contains a schoolhouse that might be interpreted as an 'external' school, for it is located outside of the *claustrum*.<sup>30</sup> Ekkehard IV (d. c. 1060), writing of the glorious past of his community, seems to support this hypothesis: under Abbot Grimald (841-872) the *scolae claustris* were entrusted to Marcellus, while Iso bore responsibility for the *scolae exteriores, id est canonicae*.<sup>31</sup> Even if we disregard the fact that Ekkehard was writing long after the Plan was drawn up and may well have been referring to a contemporary situation, his history of St Gall is hardly proof for the persistence of an external school in this monastery. Elsewhere, his story shows that the distinction between the oblates and the young clerics was in fact rather ephemeral. The 'children in habit' were jealous of young Salomo, who was later to become the third bishop of that name in Konstanz, because he was brought up in a more delicate way, as befitted a secular cleric;<sup>32</sup> however, he was their

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<sup>29</sup> See Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 85-107, who conveniently summarises the copious literature on this topic. Her position in the debate is generally similar to the views I presented in *Kind en klooster*, pp. 165-75. We both came to the conclusion that St Gall's external school was exceptional, and may not always have been as 'external' as it has been made out to be, especially by Horn and Born, *The Plan of St Gall*. Regarding the effectiveness of the measures of 817, Hildebrandt is more optimistic than I am, however. By and large, after 817 secular clerics continued to be educated within the monastic confines, often together with child oblates.

<sup>30</sup> The best analysis of the Plan of St. Gall is to be found in Zettler, 'Der St Galler Klosterplan'. See also Hecht, *Der Sankt Galler Klosterplan*; De Vogüé, 'Le Plan de St-Gall'; Sanderson, 'The Plan of St. Gall reconsidered'.

<sup>31</sup> Ekkehard, *Casus sancti Galli*, c. 2, p. 20: 'Traduntur post tempus Marcello scolae claustris cum Nokero, postea cognomine Balbulo, et caeteris monachici habitus pueris; exteriores autem, id est canonicae, Ysoni cum Salomone et eius comparibus'.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1, p. 18: 'Salomonis tertii parentes cum essent clari et inlustres, ipsum Isoni sancti Galli monacho, tunc temporis doctori nominatissimo, tradunt erudiendum et clericatui initiandum. Quem adprime, ut aiunt, ipse [Iso] erudierat; sed et Nokeri, Tuotilonis, Ratperti, Harthmanni commonachorum statui praetulerat et delicatius quasi canonicum educaverat. Creverant tamen inde clandestine inter summae indolis condiscipulos invidiae; et cum conliberales genere essent et ingenio, ut ea aetas solet, aequanimiter non ferebant alienum sibi, qui fratres essent, praeferrí, et qui natalibus

*condiscipulus*, and their jealousy could hardly have been aroused if the two groups of pupils had been permanently and strictly separated. From Ekkehard's description of the great fire in 937 it also transpires that St Gall had one schoolhouse, situated north of the church.<sup>33</sup> When speaking of those who were educated in St Gall, he always called them *discipuli* or *scolares*, without any further attempt at differentiation.<sup>34</sup> The division of tasks between schoolmasters had disappeared when master Ekkehard II (d. 900) headed 'both schools',<sup>35</sup> but it remains uncertain whether this should be interpreted as 'two schoolhouses'. More likely, two groups of pupils were implied who received their education together. In the mid-ninth century, two books from St Gall's library were 'in the school' (*ad scolam*), which again points to the existence of one location instead of two.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the Plan of St Gall itself has only one schoolhouse, denoted as *domus scholae communis, id est vacationis*. The word 'communal' should be taken more seriously, in that it might well have referred to the schoolhouse for *all* pupils, oblates and secular clerics included; the term *vacatio* also merits attention, for it had a specific connotation within Carolingian monastic spirituality. For Hildemar and Smaragdus, *vacatio* expressed a total liberation from all secular concerns, enabling the monk to concentrate completely on the service of the Lord.<sup>37</sup> The Plan's expression '*id est vacationis*' therefore

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quidem essent pares, doctrinarum provectibus ab illo praeiri'. Even if Ekkehard is projecting contemporary dissension upon a past age, one may well imagine such tensions indeed having troubled Carolingian monasteries. The 'insiders', the oblates, could not support this outsider who was getting preferential treatment while being of no more than equal birth and abilities. This may well have been a reason to separate the oblates from those who received a 'canonical' education, if the monastery concerned had sufficient means to do so.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 67, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1, p. 18; c. 33, p. 76; c. 34, p. 78; c. 35, p. 80; c. 44, p. 100; c. 57, p. 124; c. 80, p. 168; c. 89, p. 184; c. 103, p. 208; c. 103, p. 208-10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 89, pp. 182-4.

<sup>36</sup> Lesne, *Les écoles*, p. 742; cf. Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, vol. I, pp. 67 and 70. The book in question was a *Breviarium*. Lesne was of the opinion that the inner school was located in the cloister of the novices and oblates; cf. *Les écoles*, p. 398.

<sup>37</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, prol., p. 48; Hildemar, *Expositio*, prol., p. 66. This exegesis is probably based on Bede, *Expositio in primam epistolam Petri*, cols. 53-4. Hecht's suggestion that the school of St Gall was divided into two sections, one for learning and one for leisure, therefore seems unfounded; cf. Hecht, *Der Sankt Galler Klosterplan*, p. 132-3.

viewed St Gall's schoolhouse in terms of monastic spirituality, which makes it even less likely that whatever went on in this building was considered central rather than external to the community.<sup>38</sup>

St Gall clearly did not follow the precept of 817 to allow only oblates into the monastic school. The community continued to educate young clerics and lay boys not necessarily destined for the monastic life. In Walahfrid Strabo's *Life of St Gall* we encounter a thief who stole a precious codex from a boy's '*mansio*', while the latter was singing in the choir with the monastery's *scholastici*; the expression *mansio* suggests that this boy did not sleep in a communal dormitory, but in more private lodgings, possibly located outside the cloister.<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere, Walahfrid mentioned a wax-stealing *scholasticus* living in St Gall's guest house,<sup>40</sup> which may indeed have housed the monastery's temporary pupils. Whatever the case, such pupils were a fact of life, and there may very well have been lay boys in their midst. As the St Gall charters testify, some fathers kept their children's options open, making donations to the community for the upkeep of their son on the condition that the boy was fed and clothed properly until he reached the age to become a monk. When one Reginbert did so in 858, he seriously considered the possibility that his son might return to the world after all, for he stipulated the right to buy back his property if this were the case.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, when Cundarat made similar provisions for his son Albinus

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<sup>38</sup> The assumption has been that the oblates received their training in a separate *claustrum* together with the novices, as it would appear from the explanation '*hoc claustrum oblatores pulsantibus adsociantur*'. The twelve rooms adjoining the *domus communis scolae* are designated as '*hic mansiunculae scolasticorum*', which usually has been interpreted as the dwellings for the external students. Apart from the fact that the Plan of St Gall now appears less paradigmatic and influential than it once did, there are other explanations for the elusive dwellings of the *scholastici*; basing himself on Hildemar's commentary and its surprising number of *magistri*, Hafner has suggested that they were the ones who inhabited the *mansiunculae scolasticorum* ('Der Sankt Galler Klosterplan', pp. 182-4). The argument is inconclusive, for Hildemar did not necessarily make provisions similar to those of the Plan of St Gall. Many different solutions to the problem of housing temporary pupils were possible.

<sup>39</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, *Vita tertia Galli*, II, c. 28, pp. 330-1.

<sup>40</sup> Walahfrid Strabo, *Vita Ottonis*, c. 14, p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> *Urkundenbuch der Abtei St. Gallen*, vol. II, no. 461, p. 78 (27 March, 858): '... sub ea ratione, ut ipse res ad partum monasterii possideantur et filius meus Waltheri in eodem monasterio congruum nutrimentum habeat, et si ad monachilem dignitatem profecerit, suum locum habeat. Si autem hoc non evenerit, tunc liceat mihi ipsas res redimere cum I solido et hereditario jure possidere'.

fifty years earlier, he demanded that the boy be fed with the monks in the refectory, and not denied the right to enter St Gall as a monk once he reached maturity.<sup>42</sup> The young cleric Robert, who later became bishop of Metz, urgently wrote to his family, asking them to send him two shirts and a linen tunic, 'in which I can honourably show myself with my friends, rather than being disgraced by nudity'.<sup>43</sup> Apparently his kinsmen needed some prodding: in another letter Robert reminded them to remunerate his masters in St Gall, as they had promised, and to provide him – Robert – with the necessary sustenance mentioned in an earlier conversation.<sup>44</sup> Although Robert described himself as 'weaned' (*ablactatus*) and 'abroad' (*peragre*), his ties with his former home were by no means severed.

These sources reveal parental eagerness to procure a monastic education for their son, including all the material privileges of life in a great religious house; they also show the willingness of St Gall to take on temporary students, while making it equally clear that full membership of the community was not free of charge. St Gall was not exactly clamouring for new monks; those who wished to enter the community had to be well provided for by their relatives. Nonetheless, such temporary students with generous parents were no 'external' students; obviously, they had access to the cloister, sharing their daily lives with the monks as a matter of course.

The general picture that emerges is one of all *scholastici* – oblates, secular clerics and some lay boys – receiving a similar training within the monastery. Obviously, some distinction was made between the former, who were already bound to monastic life, and the latter who

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, no. 198, p. 188 (22 June, 808): 'Ista omnia in ea ratione trado ad praenominatum monasterium, ut filius meus Albini ibidem habeat vitae suae victum et omni anno vestitum et reliqua tegumenta et locum ingredi refectory, manducare cum fratribus ibique privitatem habeat inter illis. Et quando maturitate meritisque dignus appauerit, ingredi juxta morem regule in congregationem monachorum licentia ei concedatur nec ei omnimodo non negetur desiderium bone voluntatis'.

<sup>43</sup> Robert of Metz, *Epistolae*, no. 4, cols. 534-5: 'Haec est autem postulatio mea, mihi velocius ex vestra largitate transmitti tertium miserationis vestrae munusculum, id est duas camisas, et lineam tunicam, quibus incedere possim cum consodalibus meis honorifice, non cum dedecore nuditatis'. Given that Robert begged for the 'third present', such material sustenance was nothing out of the ordinary.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1, col. 533: 'Peto ergo ut promisso vestra de remunerandis sudoribus magistrorum meorum ad effectum veniat. Mihi etiam veluti peregre constituto omnium indigno necessaria quae locuti estis impendite'.

might choose to make their profession but were under no obligation whatsoever to do so. Nonetheless, secular clerics like Hrabanus' nephew Gundram, brought up in monastic communities from childhood, must have provided many new recruits; after all, the cloister had become their real home. Above all, the *scholastici* were the future intellectual elite of the Carolingian empire, monastic or otherwise. Contrary to the adult novices who at the very best might be expected to master the Psalter, they had received long and careful training. Schoolmasters like Hrabanus and Hildemar devoted infinite care to their precious charges, and were understandably disappointed when their investment came to grief, as happened in Gottschalk's case. The *scholastici* were to be found in the monastery as well as in the cathedral school: for their benefit Alcuin furnished Bishop Beornrad of Sens with a metrical version of Willibrord's Life, to be meditated upon in seclusion.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, they could be a rather critical reading public where hagiography was concerned, as may be gathered from Hucbald's complaint that they could not accept miracle stories unless these were supported by 'the authority of some book or other'.<sup>46</sup> Small wonder, for they had been raised on book-learning and had therefore become estranged from oral tradition. Sometimes the word *scholasticus* was used in a disparaging sense, comparable to *sciolus*, 'know-all': Alcuin as well as Benedict of Aniane were critical of the *sciolis* and their scholarly debates, which bordered at times on hair-splitting.<sup>47</sup> There was also the fear of the *sciolis* becoming too learned for their own good, eagerly exploring new-fangled theories best left alone; Gottschalk was to become the epitome of monastic learning that had got out of hand. In many ways he was indeed very much the product of the monastic school and its intensive grammatical and textual training.

St Gall was by no means the only monastery which harboured such a mixed group of pupils; evidence of a similar motley collection of *scholastici* can also be found for early ninth-century Corbie and St Riquier.<sup>48</sup> There are no signs whatsoever that the decree of 817

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<sup>45</sup> Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, prol., p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> Hucbald of St. Amand, *Vita Rictrudis*, prol., p. 93.

<sup>47</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 155, p. 252; *Epistolae variorum Carlo Magno regnante scriptae*, no. 40, p. 563.

<sup>48</sup> Adalhard of Corbie's *Statuta* (c. 2, p. 366) mention twelve *pulsantes* (novices) and 'seven other clerics' (*alii clerici septem*) who carried out household tasks in the periphery of the cloister; in the context of the distribution of bread, however, the



restricting monastic schools to oblates carried much weight in subsequent decades. Such efforts to restore the distance between the cloister and the outside world were the stuff that monasticism was made of; they reminded everyone of what should be, but meanwhile estates had to be run, guests had to be housed and prospective pupils presented themselves, preferably with the means to pay for their education.<sup>49</sup>

It is hard to determine the actual number of temporary pupils, for secular clerics who left the monastery having completed their education left no traces in registration of the kind discussed above;<sup>50</sup> they will not be found in profession books and registers or lists of oblates. The well-explored written records of Fulda's extensive commemoration of the dead and the living does yield some interesting data, however. It includes a list dating from the 870s, recording the names of the inhabitants of six of Fulda's dependencies.<sup>51</sup> With a membership ranging between forty and seventy, these dependencies were headed by a *magister* who was usually also a priest; generally, the proportion of priests in the dependencies was very high, amounting to two priests per three ordinary monks. Moreover, all these communities contained a dozen or more *scholastici*, who were set apart from the *monachi*. Apart from educational purposes, the six dependencies must also have served pastoral ones, with the pupils preparing themselves for priesthood in practice.<sup>52</sup>

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*pulsantes* were equated with the *scolari* ('*pulsantes vel scolarii*') (c. 11, p. 378; cf. Verhulst and Semmler, 'Les Statuts', p. 259). Evidently, in Adalhard's Corbie one could be a novice, a student and a cleric at the same time. Not all *scolari* of Corbie were oblates, therefore, as Hildebrandt, *The External School*, p. 94 has it; cf also Kasten, *Adalhard von Corbie*, p. 98, who rightly concludes that in Adalhard's Corbie, all *scolari* – be they oblates or others – were educated together. Hildebrandt provides a convincing analysis of the St Riquier material, however, where lay children played their own – modest – role in the liturgy, along with the children within the monastery; Angilbert's *scola laicorum puerorum* (cf. idem, *Institutio*, p. 297) indeed was not an 'external school' but rather a specific group within the context of a liturgical procession. See Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>49</sup> Hildebrandt, *The External School*, p. 69 mentions several instances of young clerics having to pay for their upkeep in St Gall.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>51</sup> Schmid et al. (ed.), *Die Klostersgemeinschaft von Fulda*, vol. 1, pp. 221-3; reproduced in Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 147-150.

<sup>52</sup> Schmid, 'Mönchlisten', pp. 597-610; Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 119-29. About monks and pastoral care, see especially Amos, 'Monks and pastoral care in the early Middle Ages'.

Roughly three quarters of these *scholastici* can be traced in Fulda's Annals of the Dead, which means that they died as monks of Fulda. Quite a few died so as priests, which stands to reason: the priesthood was the ultimate goal of monastic literate education. A comparison of the Annals of the Dead with the list of *scholastici* shows that the latter were largely adolescents when they lived in the dependencies, for some of them survived far into the tenth century.<sup>53</sup> The high number that eventually stayed in Fulda would indicate that many of them were in fact child oblates, but not necessarily all of them; there may also have been secular clerics like Gundram in their midst who only made their profession at some later date. The quarter of them that do not appear in the Annals of the Dead probably left Fulda to find employment elsewhere, or died before they had had a chance to make their profession. Again, the evidence points to oblates being educated together with other pupils destined for an ecclesiastical career. For all practical purposes, the dependencies were something like external schools, though not in the sense usually accorded to this elusive phenomenon. These were communities in the full sense of the word, where monks in orders lived together with their pupils and successors: oblates, secular clerics and possibly lay boys as well.

As for child oblates, already in the ninth century their number in Fulda was surprisingly high. Three extensive lists of Fulda's living *fratres* dating respectively from 781/782 (F1), 822 (F2) and 825/826 (F3) contain the names of many very young monks, as becomes evident on comparison with the Annals of the Dead. The list F1, compiled under Abbot Baugulf and comprising 384 monks, is headed by some fifty monks who all lived until fifty or sixty years afterwards; one of them even survived for eighty-one years.<sup>54</sup> Baugulf's list included also the monks living in the dependencies of Fulda, whereas F2 only listed those living in the central monastery. Most of them were either old men or very young monks; the latter must have been young child oblates who were raised within the confines of the *claustrum*. Probably they were boys who were being trained in the school and the *scriptorium*; names of youngsters who later became famous scholars – such as Brun Candidus, Gottschalk, Hatto and Rudolf – all occur in this list.<sup>55</sup> The

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<sup>53</sup> Schmid, 'Mönchslisten', pp. 609-10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 582.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 586-7; Sandmann, 'Wirkungsbereiche fuldischer Mönche', p. 760.

third and largest compilation of names, F3, was drawn up during Hrabanus Maurus' abbacy, to be sent to Reichenau for purposes of commemoration. Including the dependencies as well as Fulda proper, it was organised according to ecclesiastical ranks: priests were followed by deacons and subdeacons, while monks without orders came last. Behind these names, many very young monks hide as well, although their number is less staggering than that of F2. This confirms that the dependencies housing the *scholastici* were not the only places where oblates were to be found. A substantial number of them, possibly the younger ones, were reared within the *claustrum* itself.<sup>56</sup>

The bonds of prayer between Fulda and Reichenau remained very strong in subsequent years, so that smaller ad hoc lists of recently deceased as well as newly arrived *fratres* were regularly sent to Reichenau. As appears from the Annals of the Dead, most newcomers to Fulda must have been children, or at best adolescents: the majority of them died only after 900.<sup>57</sup> Between 825 and 835, Fulda had to accommodate a staggering number of such young recruits: in this decade, at least a hundred, but more likely 130 of them entered the community to become monks.<sup>58</sup> Small wonder, then, that the care of the *parvuli* weighed heavily on Abbot Hrabanus and his colleagues, and that efforts were made to stem the flow, at least where temporary students were concerned.

Still, royal monasteries never quite relinquished their role as training centres for the religious elite. It has been suggested that after Charlemagne's and Alcuin's initial call upon monasteries to harness themselves to the cause of clerical literacy, the principal burden of training soon shifted to the secular clergy, notably the bishops; after the late eighth century, sources indicate more episcopal than monastic activity.<sup>59</sup> This is indeed the case, but with equally good reasons one might argue that monasteries soon organised themselves to face the challenge, while there

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<sup>56</sup> Schmid, 'Mönchslisten', pp. 589-92. From narrative sources many names of Fulda's *pueri nutriti* are known, whereas these only yield two older *conversi*, Hessi and Eburwart; cf. Freise, 'Einzugsbereich', p. 1018-9, who concludes (p. 1027) that a large number of monks must have entered Fulda as oblates, although they can't be identified as such in the lists.

<sup>57</sup> Schmid and Althoff, 'Rückblick auf die Fuldaer Klostersgemeinschaft', pp. 211-5; Schmid, 'Hrabanus Maurus', pp. 116-7.

<sup>58</sup> Schmid and Althoff, 'Rückblick', p. 213.

<sup>59</sup> Hildebrandt, *The External School*, pp. 62-3.

was still a lot to do in the bishoprics. When Archbishop Arn of Salzburg urged his bishops to establish schools in their dioceses,<sup>60</sup> the great monastic schools were already flourishing; and when Theodulf of Orléans tried to organise the training of his secular clergy, he firmly relied upon the five monasteries Charlemagne had presented him with.<sup>61</sup> The famous decree of 817, demanding that monastic schools be closed to all but oblates, was an understandable reaction to an enterprise about to be killed by its own success; nonetheless, it was a rearguard action, which did very little to change the position of royal monasteries as attractive centres of learning.

### 3. MONASTIC STABILITY AND THE STATE

Had nothing like the Rule of Benedict existed in Carolingian times, it would have had to be invented, for its hierarchical structure seemed tailor-made for rulers using the spiritual and material resources of monasteries as building blocks for government. Benedict's abbot acted as the vicar of Christ, guiding a community living under 'the abbot and the Rule'.<sup>62</sup> The paramount authority of the abbot facilitated outside control of the community through its leader; once the abbot was a royal

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<sup>60</sup> *Concilium Rispacense* c. 8, MGH Conc. II, 1, p. 199: 'Episcopus autem unusquisque in civitate sua scolam constituat et sapientem doctorem, qui secundum traditionem Romanorum possit instruere et lectionibus vacare et inde debitum discere, ut per canonicas horas cursus in aeclesia debeat canere unicuique secundum congruum tempus vel dispositas festivitates, qualiter ille cantus adornet aeccliam Dei et audientes aedificentur. Et cum summa reverentia et amore Dei ministrent in altare Domini, ut populus, qui hoc audiverit vel viderit, cum alia praedicatione vel illa compunctione, quam videt et audit, adtrahatur ad amorem caelestem et compunctus hoc agat, quod placeat'.

<sup>61</sup> Theodulf, *Capitulare I*, c. 19, pp. 115-6; see above, n. 22.

<sup>62</sup> *RB*, c. 2, 2: 'Christi enim agere vices in monasterio creditur ...'. Although the Rule also exhorts the abbot to consult his community on important decision, it leaves no doubt that the last word was his; cf. *RB*, c. 3, 5: '... et magis in abbatis pendat arbitrio, ut quod salubrius esse iudicaverunt, ei cuncti oboediant'. As Angenendt (*Das Frühmittelalter*, p. 106) observed: 'Die Regel ist für alle die Norm; nicht mehr gilt, wie in den Anfängen des Zönotitums und auch noch beim heilige Martin, allein das charismatische Wort und das lebendige Vorbild des Abtes. In der nunmehr propagierten Verpflichtung auf die Regel wird das Kloster "gesetzlich" und die Unterstellung unter den Abt "hierarchisch". Der Mönch lebt, wie die wichtige Formel heißt, "unter Abt und Regel"'.

*fidelis*, the monks likewise served as a royal army, albeit an army of prayer. Their obligation of stability facilitated royal dominion over monasteries and their vast wealth. Against this background, royal interest in monastic stability and the Rule of Benedict acquires an extra dimension. The Benedictine vow of *stabilitas* and *oboedientia* concerned not only people, but also the gifts they brought with them upon entering monastic communities. This is not to say that Carolingian rulers simply endorsed the *Regula Benedicti* to get their hands on monastic property. They had many reasons for doing so, mainly centering upon the tremendous prestige of a monastic rule closely associated with Rome and the papacy.<sup>63</sup> But once a donation of property had become the precondition for entering monastic life, the stability of land and people were two sides of the same coin; consequently, in royal monasteries 'instability' directly affected royal resources. By upsetting the regularity of a great royal abbey Gottschalk undermined the divinely appointed order of the empire itself. Hrabanus made the most of this argument in his official treatise destined for Louis the Pious, but in a worried letter he pointed to yet another connection between the fate of Fulda's child oblates and the position of the ruler. Through his attempt to retrieve his inheritance, donated to Fulda in the days of Charlemagne, Gottschalk posed a direct threat to the *hereditas* of Louis the Pious.<sup>64</sup> In other words, Hrabanus viewed all donations to the royal abbey of Fulda as belonging to the royal inheritance; anyone interfering with it pitted himself directly against the monarch.

The possibility of invoking the principle of *stabilitas* was certainly useful to secular power in a political order supported by monastic prayer and possessions. This applied first and foremost to child oblation; being the predominant mode of monastic recruitment, it furnished the rulers with an army of monks and nuns closely bound to their communities. Given to God as a sacrifice, they were severed from the world by the simultaneous donation of their inheritance. After being handed over, an upbringing within the community would bond them to the *claustra monasterii* in a way impossible to achieve with adult novices familiar with other ways of life. *Stabilitas* was at the core of Benedictine child oblation. The notion must have been attractive to rulers envisaging a

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<sup>63</sup> Wollasch, 'Benedictus Abbas Romensis'. About the spread of Benedict's Rule, see Moyse, 'Monachisme et réglementation monastique'.

<sup>64</sup> See above, chapter II, § 4B.

realm in which 'everyone in his order and place' would take charge of their own *ministerium*.<sup>65</sup>

All the same, Benedict's Rule was not written to serve as the *una regula* within the new Christian empire. It was the work of one of many abbots influenced by Eastern monasticism, who produced a written code for one particular community in Italy. For all its emphasis on hierarchy and order, the Rule exudes the atmosphere of a small and intimate community not in need of complex institutions. All owed unquestioning obedience to the abbot, who was like a father living amidst his sons. Child oblates were no negligible presence in Benedict's monastery, but they certainly did not dominate monastic recruitment patterns as they would in the Carolingian world. Children learned in daily practice, growing up amongst adults who had a joint responsibility for their moral and intellectual education; age and rank were not to determine a monk's position within the group.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, with the exception of the child oblates, stability and obedience were a matter of personal vocation. Entry into monastic life represented a voluntary sacrifice of personal liberty, with the novice relinquishing power over himself when entering 'the school of the Lord's service'; through stability and obedience the new monk learned to divest himself of his ties with the world outside.<sup>67</sup> As an ascetic ideal it was very different from the self-imposed exile of *peregrinatio*, but both models aimed at a total renunciation of all social ties. Wandering as well as secluded monks were to be outsiders to 'the world'.

Such professional outsiders have always been of tremendous importance to the societies they left behind; their very charisma was vested in the extent to which they managed to distance themselves from ordinary life. The Rule of Benedict presented itself as only 'a little rule for beginners', a first communal step on the road to a more individual

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Guillot, 'L'Exhortation au partage des responsabilités'; idem, 'Une *ordinatio* méconnue'; Nelson, 'Kingship and empire'.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *RB*, c. 63, 9: 'Pueris per omnia ab omnibus disciplina conservata'; c. 70, 4: 'Infantum vero usque quindecim annorum aetates disciplinae diligentia ab omnibus et custodia sit ...'. For the Master as well as for Benedict, education was carried out in the practice of everyday life; about this principle of 'Lernen durch Nachleben', see Illmer, *Erziehung und Wissensvermittlung*, pp. 35-60, and idem, 'Totum namque in sola experientia usuque consistit'.

<sup>67</sup> Wollasch, 'Das Mönchsgelübde als Opfer'.

perfection.<sup>68</sup> When Carolingian rulers elevated the Rule to a position of sole supremacy, however, they favoured the legal and hierarchical elements of the Rule, forging it into an instrument to discipline and regulate religious communities. If the continuity of prayer was to support the well-being of rulers and the realm, stability and obedience were essential prerequisites.

The beginnings of change are already visible in the conciliar decrees of the sixth and seventh centuries, aimed against monks and nuns guilty of wandering out of their communities; they had to be forcibly returned to the cloister. Their 'wandering' (*vagare*) was not the kind of roaming around between monasteries described and denounced by the Master and Benedict,<sup>69</sup> but a straightforward flight back to possessions they left behind when entering monastic life.<sup>70</sup> In other words, *vagare* was being redefined as an illegitimate return to the world. Increasingly, secular

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<sup>68</sup> *RB*, c. 73, 8: 'Quisquis ergo ad patriam caelestiam festinas, hanc minimam inchoationis regulam descriptam adiuvante Christo perforce ...'.

<sup>69</sup> *RM*, c. 1, 13-72, pp. 332-44; *RB* c. 1, 10-11. Especially the Master was very specific when it came to *gyrovagi*: they wandered from monastery to monastery, sponging off the poor.

<sup>70</sup> This development can be traced in the Merovingian conciliar texts. The council of Agde (a. 506) (c. 27, *Concilia Galliae*, vol. I, p. 205) forbade wandering monks to be ordained clerics, unless their abbot could vouch for them; this decree aims to protect the authority of the abbot *vis-à-vis* the bishops, and uses the expression *monachi vagantes* in fairly neutral sense. The council of Orléans (a. 511) (c. 19, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 10), took a different line, however, insisting upon the bishop's authority, and on his right to force wandering monks to return to their monastery: 'Ipsi autem qui fuerint pervagati, ubi inventi fuerint, cum auxilio episcopi tamquam fugacis sub custodia revocentur; et reum se ille abba futurum esse cognoscat, qui in huiusmodi personas non regulari animadversione distinxerit vel qui monachum susceperit alienum'. For the council of Paris (a. 614) (c. 14, *ibid.*, p. 279), 'wandering' had simply become running back to the world one had left behind: 'Illud etiam unanimes consensu convenit, ut, si quis monachorum aut monacha in congregationem positi religiosam conversationem elegerint et postea aut ad parentes aut quamcumque propriam substantiam se de congregatione ipsa subtraxerint et ab episcopo suo per epistola admoniti ad septa monasterii redire distulerint, sint usque ad exitum vitae a communione suspensi nec prius ad eucharistiae gratia admittantur, quam ad ouilem suum, de quo se vagationis insolentia visi sunt subtraxisse, cum humillimae subplicationis debeant satisfactione reverti'. In other words, to be a monk or a nun was to live a communal life ('in congregatione positi'); moreover, 'vagantes' were supposed to have a fixed address, to which the bishop could send his letter. I am grateful to Albrecht Diem for calling my attention to these important texts; see Diem, *Mobilität und Disziplinierung*, pp. 136-54.

society seems to have had a vested interest in monastic stability and prayer, with religious communities responding by turning themselves into veritable prayer mills. The custom of *laus perennis* – the continual singing of psalms – is already mentioned in sixth-century sources, and was widely observed until the 816 decrees forbade it. The *laus perennis* implied the non-stop singing of some 450 psalms within twenty-four hours, with sections of the community taking turns, while the custom proposed in Aachen in 816 demanded ‘only’ 138 psalms, sung by all.<sup>71</sup> With such formidable liturgical duties to be carried out, it was important that everyone stay in his place.

In the pre-Carolingian era, it was the bishops who took disciplinary action if monks and nuns ‘wandered’. They were to assist abbots and abbesses in forcibly returning the runaways to their communities. As the council of Orléans (511) had it, errant monks should be recalled ‘into captivity, like a runaway slave’, revealing that monasticism was viewed as a form of *servitium*.<sup>72</sup> Although Merovingian kings represented a powerful influence over ecclesiastical gatherings, they remained in the background when it came to chasing errant monks and nuns back to their monasteries. During the last important Merovingian council, meeting in Paris in 614, the bishops still took full charge of disciplinary measures against the ‘insolence of wandering’. But by 755, when Pippin III organised a council in the *palatium* of Ver, things had changed. This gathering was not so much concerned with restraining individuals as with establishing control of whole communities via their leaders. Male and female communities were ‘to lead a regular life, according to their order’. If they refused to do so, they subsequently faced disciplinary action from their bishop, the metropolitan and – ultimately – a public synod.<sup>73</sup> Here regal power asserted itself, through a hierarchical chain

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<sup>71</sup> Hallinger, ‘Überlieferung und Steigerung im Mönchtum’, pp. 134–46.

<sup>72</sup> See above, n. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Council of Ver (755), MGH Capit. I, c. 5, p. 34: ‘Ut monasteria, tam virorum quam puellarum, secundum ordinem regulariter vivant; et si hoc facere contempserint, episcopus in cuius parrochia esse videntur hoc emendare debeat. Quod si non potuerit, hoc quem metropolitanum constituimus innotescat, et ipse hoc emendare faciat. Quod si hoc nec ipse emendare potuerit, ad sinodum publicum exinde veniant, et ibidem canonicam sententiam accipiat. Et si publicum sinodum contempserit, aut honorem suum perdat aut excommunicetur ab omnibus episcopis, et talis in eius locum in ipso sinodo constituatur per verbum et voluntatem domno rege vel consensu servorum Dei, qui secundum sanctam ipsam gregem regat’.



of command: abbots and abbesses of irregular monasteries were to be excommunicated by all bishops, or, if they headed royal monasteries, they stood to lose their *honor*. Moreover, 'by word and wish of the lord king and with the assent of the servants of God', they were to be replaced by worthy successors.

The decisions of Ver, promulgated as a royal capitulary, reveal a king intent on creating stability and order in 'his' church, as well as monasteries having become much more enmeshed with royal power than had been the case in preceding centuries. Abbesses were forbidden to travel to the court, unless they were told to do so by the king; if they wished to bring him gifts, they could do so through messengers.<sup>74</sup> If a monastic community lived in a regular fashion, monks were not permitted to wander off to Rome or other places without their abbot's approval. Only if the irregular behaviour of their abbot endangered their souls, they could leave their community to live in a better one, and only with the bishop's permission.<sup>75</sup> Nobody having been tonsured or veiled could hold on to his or her property or live outside of the structures of authority: either they entered a 'regular' monastery or they put themselves *sub manu episcopi*.

The key words of Ver are *correctio*, *regulariter vivere*, *ordo* and *oboedientia*. Although the word *stabilitas* is never used, its paramount importance is implied in its contrary, 'wandering' (*vagare*). The main target of the operation was to bind all monks and nuns to specific communities under the control of an abbot, abbess or bishop; in the background hovered the king, to whom all were answerable. Everyone who 'wandered', was to be tied to one particular place, bishops included. Bishops living within monasteries without having their own diocese had been a common phenomenon, especially in missionary territory, but now they were also subsumed under the category of the much too elusive *vagantes*, to be disciplined forthwith.<sup>76</sup> The effects of the decrees of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, c. 6, p. 34.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., c. 10, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., c. 13, p. 35-6: 'De episcopis vagantibus, qui parrochias non habent (...) ut in alterius parrochia ministrare nec ullam ordinationem facere non debeant sine iussione episcopi cuius parrochia est.' About 'monastic bishops', see Frank, 'Die Klosterbischöfe'; De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', pp. 627-9. the theme of *vagare* remained a persistent one, as appears from the Council of Mainz (813), MGH Concilia II, 1, c. 22, p. 267 ('*De clericis vagis*').

Ver may have been limited, but they set the tone for successive waves of *correctio* and reform identifying 'regularity' with Benedict's Rule.

Benedictine life in the great royal abbeys emerging after the mid-eighth century differed vastly from the monastic milieu in which the Rule had taken shape. The position of children within the community is as good an indication as any of the transformations of religious life since Benedict's day. Instead of being a minority growing up amongst adults, who educated them in the course of daily monastic routine, they now represented the majority of newcomers. They were numerous enough to form a separate *ordo infantum*, requiring schools, specialised schoolmasters, and permanent vigilance exercised by yet other masters; by 800, their number had risen sufficiently to merit regulation and legislation. Meanwhile, monasteries had opened their gates to young secular clerics as well as some high-born lay children, producing a steady flow of well-instructed *litterati* employable in the administration of the Christian empire. Monastic schools not only produced ecclesiastical *fideles* who could be made into abbots or bishops, but also learned men called to the court to educate princes or to counsel the ruler. Some of these started their lives as monks, but others were simply clerics or laymen, being educated within the cloister without ever entering religious life.

Monastic life was lived in close contact with the world of secular power, and responded to its needs. This constant proximity necessitated a repeated redrawing of boundaries. Carolingian monastic reform seems strangely contradictory, for in spite of efforts to isolate monks and nuns from the contamination of 'the world', there was no intention to sever the intimate ties between royal monasteries and the court. To the contrary: in so far as the segregation of the cloister safeguarded the continuity of prayer, it served the interests of the empire. The *claustrum* was the architectural expression of this combination of separation and interconnectedness: within the monastery at large with its hustle and bustle of guests, workmen and pilgrims an inner sanctuary was established, to which only members of the community itself had access. This ordering of space was the answer to the conflicting demands of concentrated prayer and unreserved hospitality.

Nonetheless, there were locations within the monastic precincts where insiders and outsiders invariably came face to face, such as the abbot's house and the school, and these remained bones of contention. Was the monastery to be a school of divine or of royal service? In 817 reformers opted for the former, restricting the use of the monastic school to child oblates. Significantly, this decision was only reached after long and

heated discussion. For the time being, the concern for stability and claustrality prevailed, but as we have seen, royal monasteries such as Fulda and St Gall continued to serve as training grounds for secular clerics. The demand for monastic learning was simply too overwhelming to make the Aachen politics of separation practicable. Strictly speaking, this represented a failure of reform, but it could also be viewed as a success for monasticism, for incomplete isolation meant that the monastic code of behaviour could continue to leave its imprint on the Carolingian elite. As long as princes and high aristocrats received their intellectual and moral training within the cloister, or from monastic tutors living at the court, the monastery served as an important model for political organisation. Indeed, capitularies discussing order, concord, unanimity, 'ministries', alms-giving, gifts and prayer, seem to reflect the well-oiled administration of large abbeys rather than royalty asserting its right to order the realm. The ruling lay elite had many opportunities to familiarise themselves with monastic life, ranging from brief visits to an upbringing within the cloister. Although the monks made it clear that the ways of the world were quite different from theirs, these different codes of behaviour were in constant interaction. Hence, monastic stability was not only a prerequisite for prayer stabilising the realm, but it also furnished rulers with a 'model for empire'.<sup>77</sup> At times of crisis, monastic discipline spilled over from the cloister into the world outside. As appears from a capitulary dating from the 780s, the whole realm was turned into one big machinery of prayer, alms-giving and fasting 'for the lord king and the army of the Franks and the present tribulations', with the counts, *vassi dominici* and those in their households also being expected to do their share.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, when crisis broke out in religious communities, they looked to royal power to restore the regularity of internal life.

#### 4. *INVITUS ET COACTUS*: MONASTIC PRISONERS

When the ambitious abbot Ratger almost brought ruin to Fulda by building an 'immense and superfluous' church, his exasperated monks sought the support of the emperor himself, offering a petition (*Supplex*

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<sup>77</sup> Noble, 'The monastic ideal as a model for Empire'.

<sup>78</sup> *Capitulare episcoporum* (c. 780), MGH Capit I, p. 52.

*Libellus*) to Charlemagne and demanding that the outsiders who had come to dominate life within the cloister would be ousted.<sup>79</sup> Most of the grievances arose from the community's inability to carry out what it considered to be its primary responsibility: prayer. The monks petitioned the emperor for a restoration of liturgical practice as it had been before Ratger interfered with it, including the daily prayer for the ruler, his family and the *populus christianus*.

Ratger's opponents not only protested against laymen and secular clerics taking over managerial duties from the monks, but also about unfit members of the community itself. These consisted of two categories: those who had entered Fulda in order to better themselves materially, and those who had been forcibly made into monks or clerics. No free man or serf should be compelled to enter monastic life, said the *Supplex Libellus*, for this lamentable practice introduced a criminal and vicious element into the cloister. The monks wrote their petition at a time when Fulda's membership was rapidly expanding; obviously, Ratger had been using both seduction and coercion to fill his gigantic church, roping in newcomers whenever he got a chance. But who were the *clerici* who, tonsured against their will, endangered the internal order of the community? One of the more specific grievances formulated in the petition sheds some light on this matter:

Malicious men with rabid minds, prepared to perpetrate every possible crime, should not be taken into the monastery, as has happened with this homicidal cleric who killed a monk after having been placed in the monastery against the will and without the express consent of the brethren, for we fear that the relatives of this monk will be inflamed by diabolical persuasion to avenge his death, thus augmenting the number of murders; those whose crimes and misdeeds make them unfit to live amongst the laity should not be located together in places near the monastery, for they rob monasteries through theft and infest the neighbourhood with their robbery.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Semmler, 'Studien zum *Supplex Libellus*'; De Jong, 'Carolingian monasticism', pp. 646-51.

<sup>80</sup> *Supplex Libellus*, c. 17, p. 326: 'Quod malitiosae et furiosae mentis homines et ad cuncta flagitia perpetranda promptissimi non colligantur intra monasterium sicut factum est de illo homicida clerico qui monachum interfecit, qui contra omnium fratrum voluntatem et consensum locatus est in monasterio, quia timemus, ne forte cognati ipsius monachi diabolica suasionem in ultionem eius inflammentur et homicidium augeatur; quodque ipsi qui propter scelera sua et improbitates inter

This sounds like a cry for help from monks who, having been brought up in the cloister, were faced with the outside world increasingly spilling over into their sacred precinct. As *nutriti*, they must have felt the disparity between themselves and these disruptive outsiders all the more keenly. Criminal elements were being housed in the vicinity of the monastery, and even in the cloister itself, against the wishes of its proper inhabitants. Most likely, this particular cleric belonged to the large and diverse category of those who had been tonsured and carted off to a monastery as a punishment for misdeeds committed in the outside world.<sup>81</sup>

Royal monasteries like Fulda provided kings with instruments of control and exclusion in an early state without prisons. The aftermath of the revolt of Bernard of Italy provides a good example of this aspect of monastic life. When in 818 the rebels had been forced into submission, the initial death sentence for Bernard and the other ringleaders was converted into blinding, a punishment which ultimately cost Bernard his life.<sup>82</sup> According to the Frankish Annals, most of his followers were treated more leniently, being sent to the cloister. All the bishops were deposed, and 'mancipated' to monasteries as a matter of course; as for the laity, those most guilty were to be exiled, while those deemed to be *innocentior* were to be 'tonsured, to live in monasteries'.<sup>83</sup> In a kind of reflex action, Louis the Pious then forestalled possible rebellious actions on the part of his three half-brothers Drogo, Hugh and Theoderic by imposing clerical tonsure on them.<sup>84</sup> He committed them to the care of

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saeculares esse non poterant in vicina monasterii loca gregatim non collocentur, quia furto monasteria depraedant et proxima quaeque loca latrocinii infestant'.

<sup>81</sup> About this phenomenon, see Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*; Laske, *Das Problem der Mönchung*; Laske, 'Zwangsaufenthalt im mittelalterliche Klöster'; Noetlichs, 'Das Kloster als Strafanstalt', the latter with interesting comparisons with Byzantium; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 36-40.

<sup>82</sup> About this revolt, see most recently Jarnut, 'Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme und Bernhard von Italien', esp. pp. 645-8.

<sup>83</sup> *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 818, p. 148: '... coniurationis auctores iussit orbari, episcopos synodali decreto depositos monasteriis mancipari, caeteros, prout quisque vel nocentior vel innocentior apparebat, vel exilio deportari vel detondi atque in monasteriis conversari'. Cf. Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 30, p. 306.

<sup>84</sup> Thegan, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 24, p. 232. See Nithard, *Historiae*, I, c. 2, p. 388: 'Hinc autem metuens, ne post dicti fratres populo sollicitato eadem facerent, ad conventum publicum eos venire precepit, totondit ac per monasteria sub libera custodia commendavit'.

Bishop Frothar of Toul, who locked them up in his monastery of St Evre.<sup>85</sup> But only three years later the tide had turned. At the assembly of Diedenhofen in 821 the emperor declared a general amnesty, allowing all insurgents to leave their monasteries as well as their involuntary clerical state. Most of them must have done so, although Paschasius Radbertus noted in his *Life of Adalhard* that some chose to stay, now giving freely to God what they had been forced to offer ignominiously and against their will.<sup>86</sup> As for Drogo and Hugh, they returned to the court and imperial favour; they pursued successful ecclesiastical careers, in remarkable harmony with the emperor who had forced them to enter the church in the first place.<sup>87</sup>

What emerges from this brief outline of extremely complex events is that political opponents were being routinely rendered harmless by being sent off to monasteries. This did not imply that they became monks, however. Clerical tonsure seems to have been the appropriate punishment. Although some, like Hugh, later became monks of their own volition, those who had become *clerici inviti* were under no obligation to do so. They were put on hold, to wait until the political tide had turned and they could be allowed to leave the monasteries they had been assigned to. They could even decide to discard their clerical state, if the powers that were allowed them to do so. This is confirmed by reports of the rebellion of 830. In the aftermath, says the Astronomer, Louis the Pious displayed a truly imperial leniency towards his opponents: 'He ordered the laymen to be tonsured in appropriate places, the clerics to be locked up in suitable monasteries'.<sup>88</sup> Only three months later, however, Louis decided to become even more lenient, returning their property to the insurgents and giving those already

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<sup>85</sup> Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>86</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *De Vita Adalhardi*, c. 50, col. 1534: 'Tum deinde quorundam tonsura propter furoris saevitiam illata transiit ad coronam, et dant Deo sponte, quod dudum inviti quasi ad ignominiam susceperant'.

<sup>87</sup> Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>88</sup> Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 45, p. 338: '... sed usus, ut multis visus est, leniori quam debuit pietate (...), laicos quidem praecepit locis oportunis attundi, clericos vero in convenientibus itidem monasteriis custodiri'. Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, p. 87, thinks the culprits were meant to enter monastic life forever ('Bestimmung zum Klosterleben'). Given subsequent events, this seems doubtful.

tonsured a choice between remaining clerics or returning to the lay state.<sup>89</sup>

Merovingian kings and queens had already used monasteries as places of internal exile for their political opponents,<sup>90</sup> but their Carolingian successors did so on a much larger scale. Amongst those dispatched to monasteries, rebellious members of the Carolingian family figured largely. In his *Divisio regnorum* of 806 Charlemagne neatly outlined what he thought his sons capable of: he forbade them to kill, blind, maim or forcibly tonsure their younger kinsmen.<sup>91</sup> Of all these methods of eliminating the competition, forced tonsure was the mildest solution. More often than not, an involuntary *servitium Dei* provided an alternative for the more severe sentences of death or blinding. Thus Charlemagne in 788 commuted the death sentence for his kinsman Tassilo, duke of Bavaria, into clerical tonsure, locking him up in the small monastery of St Goar.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, when an assembly meeting at Regensburg in 792 sentenced Pippin the Hunchback to death, his father Charlemagne relented, sending his son first to St Gall and then to Prüm.<sup>93</sup> These rebels apparently were saved by their kinship with the king; according to the Frankish Annals Tassilo owed his life largely to his *consanguinitas* with Charlemagne.<sup>94</sup> Carolingian monarchs seem to

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<sup>89</sup> Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 46, p. 338: 'Ipso denique tempore consuetae non immemor misericordiae, quae sicut de se ait Iob, ab initio crevit cum illo, et de utero matris videtur cum ipso egressa, eos quos dudum exigentibus meritis per diversa deputaverat loca, evocatos bonis propriis restituit; et si qui attonsi fuerant, utrum sic manere, an in habitum redire pristinum vellent, facultatem contribuit'. Cf. Hiob 31, 18.

<sup>90</sup> Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, pp. 21-44; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>91</sup> *Divisio regnorum* (a. 806), c. 18, MGH Capit. I, p. 129-30.

<sup>92</sup> Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, pp. 60-3.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9. Again, the family connection seemed to have saved the rebel. Cf. *Annales Laureshamenses*, s.a. 792, p. 35: 'Nam de Pippino filio, quia noluit rex ut occideretur, iudicaverunt Franci, ut ad servitium Dei inclinare debuisset ...'.

<sup>94</sup> *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 788, p. 56: '... visi sunt iudicasse eundem Tassilonem ad mortem. Sed dum omnes una voce adclamarent capitale eum ferire sententiam, iamdictus domnus Carolus piissimus rex motus misericordia ab amorem Dei, et quia consanguineus eius erat, contenuit ab ipsis Dei ac suis fidelibus, ut non moriretur. Et interrogatus a iamfacto clementissimo domno rege praedictus Tassilo, quid agere voluisset; ille vero postolavit, ut licentiam haberet sibi tonsorandi et in monasterio introeundi et pro tantis peccatis paenitentiam agendi et ut suam salvaret animam'.

have been extremely hesitant in carrying out death sentences, especially where members of their own family were concerned. After all, the killing of relatives and important aristocrats might sow the seeds of long-term discord, which in the end might prove to be more pernicious to royal power than the instant elimination of opponents. Hence, the role of the assembly was to proclaim a harsh verdict, and that of the king to grant royal pardon. The debts of gratitude thus accumulated were vastly preferable to the long-term enmity of the rebels' kinsmen. Blinding served as an alternative to the death penalty, but even this punishment was only meted out in rather extreme circumstances. Monastic imprisonment combined with clerical tonsure remained the first option to kings neutralising the opposition while keeping open the possibility of future reconciliation and renewed loyalty; they might always resort to more drastic measures if royal 'piety' did not have the desired effect.

The turbulent career of Charles the Bald's son Carloman reveals the potential of such a scenario. As a boy Carloman was made a cleric and entrusted to the care Abbot Wulfad of St Médard in Soissons, by means of a ritual closely resembling monastic child oblation;<sup>95</sup> according to Hincmar, he was 'offered by his father at the altar'.<sup>96</sup> Later on, under Charles' eagle eye, he was publicly and forcibly consecrated a deacon.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, Carloman's relations with his father initially were not too bad, for Carloman received a series of rich royal abbeys, and headed important diplomatic and military missions on Charles' behalf.

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<sup>95</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 854, p. 88: 'Karlus rex Karlomannum, filium suum, tonsura ecclesiastica dedicat'; Regino, *Chronicon*, s.a. 870, p. 232: 'Porro Carlomannus, cum adhuc esset puerulus, iussu patris atonsus clericus effectus est'. Neither Prudentius (the author of this part of the Annals of St Bertin) nor Regino is very clear about the sacrificial aspect of the proceedings.

<sup>96</sup> Hincmar, *Epistolae*, no. 55, col. 277: '... a patre sacro altari oblatus, religiosus divini servitii obsequiis mancipiendus ac in clericum tonsus, in dioecesi vero Senonensi ...'. Cf. *Coronatio Hermintrudis reginae*, MGH Capit. II, p. 453, which also presented Carloman as an *oblatio Deo*. It seems as if the ritual of child oblation had come to influence children's entry into the secular clergy; on the other hand, clerical tonsure may have been one of the natural consequences of 'monastic' child oblation.

<sup>97</sup> Regino, *Chronica*, s.a. 870, p. 232: '... dehinc procedente tempore ad diaconatus officium, quamvis invitatus atque coactus, in praesentia genitoris ordinatus est ...'. Cf. Hincmar, *Epistolae*, no. 55, col. 277.



However, in 870/872, ready to claim his stake in the kingdom, he rebelled.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, in 870 he was robbed of his abbacies and locked up in what seems to have been the main secular prison of the West-Frankish kingdom, the *castrum* of Senlis.<sup>99</sup> Paternal leniency prevailed for a while and the rebel was set free, but he gradually lost support, and was locked up once more at the beginning of 873. As Hincmar commented, 'the bishops did what had to be done: they deposed Carloman from all ecclesiastical rank, according to the sacred rules, and left him only the communion of a layman'.<sup>100</sup> This measure proved counter-productive, for a Carloman who was no longer a deacon was all the more capable of ruling.<sup>101</sup> His followers plotted to liberate him from Senlis and to set him up as their king. This led to a second, secular trial, and a verdict of death for treason. This was subsequently converted into blinding 'so that he might have time and opportunity for doing penance, (...) yet not have the power to commit worse offences ...'.<sup>102</sup> Blinding indeed rendered Carloman powerless. Although he managed to flee from Corbie to his uncle Louis the German, he no longer posed a threat to his father; he ended his life in 881 as the abbot of Echternach.

With droves of pardoned *clerici* cheerfully returning to the world again, tonsure in itself clearly had no lasting effects. Carloman's most important handicap on the road to kingship was not his clerical state, but the fact that he had been consecrated a deacon; this must have been the reason why he underwent his consecration 'unwilling and under duress' (*invitus et coactus*). Ironically, by meting out ecclesiastical punishment and demoting him from the deaconate, the bishops played right into Carloman's hand.

Forcing them to enter the higher ecclesiastical orders was one way to keep 'political clerics' out of harm's way, as happened in the case of

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<sup>98</sup> See about this revolt and its depiction in the Annals of St Bertin: Nelson, 'A tale of two princes'.

<sup>99</sup> Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, p. 97-8; Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 226-31.

<sup>100</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 873, p. 226.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*: '... quia liberius ad nomen et potentiam regiam conscendere posset, quia ordinem ecclesiasticum non haberet ...'.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*: '... ut locum et spatium poenitendi haberet et graviora admittendi facultatem, sicut meditabatur, non haberet, luminibus (...) orbari, quatenus pernicioosa spes pacem odientium de illo frustraretur ...'.

Carloman. Once he was a deacon, it took a synodal decision to get him defrocked. This strategy was not without difficulties, for contemporaries were acutely conscious of the fact that the higher ranks of the church should be entered voluntarily, rather than *invitus et coactus*. Another possibility was submitting clerics to monastic custody, without turning them into monks, however. This had the advantage that kings could recall their opponents from the cloister if it suited them, but it also held the danger of flight and renewed insurgence, in which case sterner measures were in order.<sup>103</sup>

There is yet another category to be taken into account amongst those forced to reside in the cloister: public penitents. The ecclesiastical punishment of public penance closely resembled political tonsure; in fact, a fair number of the involuntary clerics, monks and nuns, inhabiting Carolingian *monasteria* must in fact have been public penitents. From the early 800s onwards, bishops strove to systematize the distinction between 'public' and 'secret' penance, with kings consistently supporting their endeavour. Both bishops and kings had a stake in expanding the domain of public penance, for apart from being an episcopal prerogative, *paenitentia publica* was increasingly used as a punishment against those upsetting the public, i.e. royal, order.<sup>104</sup> Not only was it imposed for morally offensive deeds such as adultery, parricide and incest, but also for crimes against the stability of the realm: robbery, rape and rebellion (*seditio*). When Lothar I, Louis the German and Charles the Bald made a treaty in the *palatium* of Meerssen in 851, one of the matters they agreed on was to refrain from harbouring runaway public penitents who had fled to another realm in order to avoid their just deserts. In the words of the ensuing capitulary:

... let this sort of man, when the bishops to whose charge he belongs shall have him made known to us, be keenly and diligently sought out, lest he finds a place to hide and stay in the realm of another of us and infect with his sickness the faithful people of God and of us; but let him be constrained by us, that is through the officers of the state, and let him

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<sup>103</sup> One of these 'sterner measures' was indeed forcing one's opponent to make a monastic profession, as happened to Louis the Pious in 833; without much result, Charles the Bald employed the same means to render Pippin II harmless. Cf. *Annales Bertiniani* s.a. 854, p. 88: 'Pippinus, Pippini filius, qui in monasterio Sancti Medardi tonsus habitum monachi susceperat et iuramentum permansionis fecerat, Aquitaniam ingreditur ...'.

<sup>104</sup> Leyser, 'Early medieval canon law'; De Jong, 'Power and humility'.

be compelled to return to his bishop (...), and receive due penance for whatever public crime he may have committed, or, if he has already received it, then let him carry it out according to the law.<sup>105</sup>

It is doubtful whether this fraternal agreement had any lasting results, but the treaty does show how the ecclesiastical punishment of public penance had become geared to the interests of royal power and public order. If the culprits could be pinned down, it proved to be a particularly effective measure against rebellious aristocrats, for public penance entailed a solemn deposition of arms, often followed by entry into a monastery as a tonsured cleric. Ultimately, a monastic profession might follow, but this was not an inescapable obligation. Presumably, penitents who became tonsured clerics were not bound to monastic stability, and could leave the community once they had expiated their sins. Hildemar of Civate primarily had such clerics in mind when he outlined the proceedings leading up to monastic profession. After two months, the newcomer had to put his arms on the altar, receiving clerical tonsure and habit, and was henceforth dispatched to the *cella novitiorum*. Benedict's Rule allowed those unable to sustain monastic discipline to leave after two months, but Hildemar was adamant that Benedict's *liber discede* only pertained to monastic profession itself. Whoever had become a cleric after putting down arms could decide against monasticism, but he had to remain a cleric, while it was the bishop's task to make sure that he did not return to the world.<sup>106</sup> Hildemar obviously reckoned with

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<sup>105</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 851, p. 78: I follow the translation of Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, p. 71.

<sup>106</sup> Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 58, p. 537-8: 'Hoc autem, quod dicit *liber discedat*, subaudiendum est: a professione monachica, quia si ante discesserit, debet subiectus esse lege canonica. Et episcopus illius parochiae non debet illum sinire ire ad saeculum secundum canonicam auctoritatem ... Sunt, qui intellegunt, quando promittat regulam, i.e. post unum annum debeat novitius radi et arma deponi. Isti non intellegunt bene, eo quod non intellegunt canones Nicaeni concilii, quid super hac ratione dicunt. Dicunt enim, decem annos poenitere, si ad saeculum reversus fuerit. Deinde sunt, qui intellegunt, ut antequam in cellam novitiorum mittatur, debeat illi legi regula, et debet arma deponi et radi, et postmodum, esse in cella novitiorum ... At postquam intraverit in cellam novitiorum, si liber est a regula, non est liber a canone Nicaeni concilii. Et ideo noluit dicere postea *liber discede*, i.e. postquam intraverit in cellam novitiorum, quia cognovit, eum teneri a canone'. Hildemar was commenting on *RB*, c. 58, 10: 'Ecce lex sub qua militare vis; si potes observare, ingredere; si vero non potes, liber discede'; according to his former master and abbot Adalhard of Corbie, whom he followed in this matter, this decisive moment occurred after two

a substantial group of 'novices' who entered the monastery as clerics, without ever becoming monks. The two months of probation enabled the community to find out whether such newcomers were not too difficult to maintain in the community, while at the same time guaranteeing their speedy disappearance from the outside world. The only choice left to those having been tonsured was to refrain from monastic profession.

By the ninth century, public penance had become a substantial weapon in the struggle for public power, but it could also be turned against the emperor himself. In the two big revolts of 830 and 833 Louis's opponents used public penance and its natural follow-up – entry into religious life – as a means to render both him and his wife Judith powerless. In 830 Judith was bullied into persuading the emperor to put down his arms and to enter into a monastery, while she was to submit to being veiled.<sup>107</sup> Louis assented to the latter, viewing it as a way to save Judith's life, but 'concerning the matter of his tonsure, the emperor requested time to deliberate'.<sup>108</sup> Judith, after having stood trial for adultery at an assembly in Verberie, was condemned to take the veil and enter Ste Croix in Poitiers, while her two brothers were tonsured and sent to monasteries. All this was rapidly undone within the very same year, once Louis regained control, but in 833 an even more serious revolt broke out. In Soissons Louis submitted to public penance, putting his arms on the altar and being clothed in the penitential garb.<sup>109</sup> For all practical purposes he was now a public penitent to be held in monastic custody, unfit to carry arms and therefore no longer an emperor. Lothar deemed his father so dangerous, however, that he did not dare to leave him in monastic custody in Soissons, so he took him along with him, first to Compiègne and then to Aachen. There Louis was put under great duress, with his enemies being adamant that he

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months, before the newcomer entered the novice's cell. Others, such as Benedict of Aniane, on the other hand, wished to delay tonsure and deposition of arms until a year of novitiate had been completed. Cf. Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 140; Semmler, 'Die Beschlüsse des Aachener Konzils', pp. 45, 81.

<sup>107</sup> About this revolt, see Sprigade, *Die Einweisung ins Kloster*, pp. 80-8.

<sup>108</sup> Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 44, p. 334-6: 'Cui cum ille secretius secum loquendi licentiam praestitisset, permittente illo, ut mortem evadere posset, ipsa velum sibi capiti superposuit; de attensione porro sua imperator tempus deliberandi poposcit'.

<sup>109</sup> De Jong, 'Power and humility'.

agree to enter a monastery of his own volition. In the words of the Annalist of St Bertin:

The Lord Emperor was being kept at Aachen. He was not being more humanely treated in any way at all: on the contrary, his enemies raged against him much more cruelly, trying night and day to weaken his spirit with such intense sufferings that he would voluntarily renounce the world and take himself off to a monastery. But he kept saying that he would never make such a commitment as long as he had no real power over his own actions.<sup>110</sup>

The Annals of St Bertin spoke of a *votum*, so apparently the monastic vow itself was at stake here, rather than a simple clerical tonsure. The emperor staunchly refused to make his profession on the grounds that he could not do so without having power over his own actions, while his opponents using all possible force to get him to do so ‘voluntarily’. This contradictory behaviour reveals a curious interplay between the notion that entry into monastic life should be non-compulsory and its opposite, a complete acceptance of coercion. In other words: one could be forced to take this momentous step of one’s own accord, preferably in public. This did not necessarily imply that mere cynical lip-service was being paid to the ideal of personal initiative. The rebels of 833 left no stone unturned to emphasise that Louis confessed publicly and in tears, asking for the penance which the bishops in their goodness then deigned to impose on him: this is the image of events his opponents tried to put across.<sup>111</sup> The appearance of voluntary submission may also have been a way to save face and honour. Much as such a humiliating ritual had a punitive effect in itself, to be compelled to exchange an aristocratic lifestyle for monastic humility was an even more shameful experience, which is precisely what made it into an effective punishment for those who had created ‘scandal’. As is clear from the aftermath of the revolt

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<sup>110</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 834, p. 22. I follow the translation by Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> *Episcoporum de poenitentia ... relatio*, MGH Capit. II, p. 55: ‘Igitur pro his vel in his omnibus, quae supra memorata sunt, reum se coram Deo et coram sacerdotibus vel omni populo cum lacrymis confessus et in cunctis se deliquisse protestatus est et poenitentiam publicam expetiit, quatinus ecclesiae, quam peccando scandalizaverat, poenitento satisfaceret ...’. Similarly, Duke Tassilo was depicted as asking for tonsure and penance. Clearly, he did not have any more of a choice than Louis did in 833, but it still remained important that his punishment appeared to be non-compulsory. See above, n. 89.

of 833, public and humiliating statements of guilt played an important role in disciplining political opponents. In 835, in St Stephen of Metz, Louis was solemnly reconfirmed in his rulership, while the chief scapegoat of the uprising, Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims, 'ascended a high place in that same church and voluntarily confessed before everyone that the Emperor had been unjustly deposed ...'.<sup>112</sup>

Ebbo of course had been made to submit to this humiliation, but all the same, his public and 'voluntary' declaration was crucial to those wishing to bring him down. Only rituals performed correctly and publicly were perceived as valid, meaning that the efficacy of a ritual resided not so much in the personal intentions of participants as in their public declaration thereof. It was the public expression of conversion or penance that mattered, therefore, which is why Louis's opponents made so much of the emperor tearfully and publicly bewailing his sins, asking for the 'medicine' of penance. They obviously felt that such a public declaration would be efficacious and binding, even when Louis had been pressured into making it.

'Appearances' were important in a world perceiving external behaviour as a reflection of internal motivation. Hence, monks were to keep their head bowed at all times as a visible expression of their humility,<sup>113</sup> while public penitents loudly lamented their sins in front of large audiences.<sup>114</sup> This does not mean that those engaging in such ritual conduct had no conception of hypocrisy or lying. Public demeanour, however, not only expressed inner states, but also shaped them.<sup>115</sup> For this reason the physical articulation of submissiveness was essential to the development of true humility. Similarly, the confession of a public penitent stating that he did so freely was believed to bring about the required inner state of remorse, even if penance had been forcibly imposed. While the notion of religious commitment being a

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<sup>112</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 835, p. 28; Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, p. 33.

<sup>113</sup> See Hildemar, *Expositio*, c. 7, p. 268, about the need for monks to remain spiritually *incurvati*, even when pruning grape vines hanging above their heads. About the spiritual meaning of being *incurvatus*, see Kasch, *Das liturgische Vokabular*, pp. 213-4.

<sup>114</sup> Jonas of Orléans, *De institutione laicali*, I, c. 10, cols. 138-9; Regino, *De synodalibus causis*, I, c. 295, pp. 136-7.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. the interesting discussion of these questions by Asad, 'On Discipline and Humility in Medieval Christian Monasticism'; the matter of sincerity is also treated in his 'Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Religion'.

matter of choice had not been relinquished in Carolingian society, its definition of 'voluntary' entry into the cloister differed vastly from the original ideals of monasticism. If personal choice was not in evidence, it could be created by persuasion, and if need be, under duress.

It is against this background that child oblation's coercive nature should be interpreted. Most Carolingian authors agreed as a matter of course that parents did have the right to bind their children to monastic life, just as kings had the right to force their opponents to enter the cloister. Coercion, then, was not a controversial issue. As we have seen, some authors even considered children to be the most perfect embodiment of the ideal of voluntary entry into monastic life, for they represented their parents' *voluntas*, whereas adults were often driven to the cloister by *necessitas*.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, parents donating children fulfilled the honourable obligation to 'return the fruit', giving freely from the wealth God had provided them with in the first place, and offering the fruit of their loins to the *servitium Dei*.<sup>117</sup> Given the fact that many adults entered the cloister under duress, be it penance or punishment, it is not surprising that abbots and monastic educators devoted most of their energy to the 'little ones'; if these children were educated with care and consideration, they would internalise a proper behavioural code. Thus, the future regularity and stability of the community would be safeguarded, no matter how many outsiders threatened the internal peace of the cloister.

All the same, the personal consent of the child oblate, once he had matured, remained important. A public expression of personal *voluntas* validated religious vows, even if this had been procured by persuasion or coercion. If this rule applied in public penance or political tonsure of adults, it surely did in the case of child oblation too. Hence, it was agreed on in 817 that child oblates should confirm the parental vows made on their behalf, once they came of age.<sup>118</sup> This measure was not the result of 'enlightened laymen' attempting to make entry into monastic life completely voluntary; neither were these laymen pitted against a group of conservative monks staunchly defending the

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<sup>116</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio*, III, p. 103, l. 920-4; see above, chapter IV, § 1.

<sup>117</sup> Hucbald of St Amand, *Vita Rictrudis*, c. 11, p. 94; *Coronatio Hermintrudis reginae*, MGH Capit. II, p. 453; see above, chapter V, § 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Synodi secundae decreta authentica* (a. 817), c. 17, *Legislatio Aquisgranensis*, CCM I, p. 477.

irrevocability of parental vows.<sup>119</sup> Forced entry into religious life had become an instrument of lay political power, first and foremost; if opposition to compulsory monasticism was to be found anywhere, it was within the monastic milieu itself, defending its 'school of the Lord's service' against the demands of the king's service, which threatened to turn monasteries into holding pens for those who could not be maintained in the outside world. Likewise, the monks themselves clearly realised that child oblates unsuitable for regular life were a burden to their community. Some, like Hrabanus and Hildemar, indeed opted for strict discipline and imprisonment as an ultimate measure, on the grounds that this was vastly preferable to exposing the youngsters they had raised to the pollution of the outside world. Others, however, saw the dangers of forcing restless child oblates to stay, for unwilling monks and nuns might endanger the integrity of the cloister. The decision to have children confirm their oblation was a compromise intended to uphold the principle of personal consent while also honouring the sanctity of the parental sacrifice, reached after much discussion within the monastic section of the assembly. It was not the enlightened laity who set Gottschalk free in 829, but a council in which abbots were well represented; for all we know, it was the emperor himself rather than 'conservative monks' who refused to return Gottschalk's inheritance, allowing him to leave Fulda but compelling him to remain a Benedictine monk for the rest of his life. Both secular and ecclesiastical powers had a vested interest in monastic stability, but if child oblates rebelled against rigid discipline, the religious communities were the ones to be saddled with the problems. Hence, they trained their charges with the utmost care, gradually instilling a personal commitment to stability.<sup>120</sup> The oblate's express confirmation of his parents' vow was to be the ultimate reward for long years of devoted 'custody and discipline': the child, once sacrificed as a holocaust, now freely sacrificed himself, devoting himself to the *schola dominici servitii*.

This was the ideal scenario, but there also was another one, turning religious houses into prisons for those monks and nuns who had proved to be ungovernable. First at the bishop's command, but from the eighth century onwards with the aid of royal power, runaway religious were forcibly returned to their communities. Once this process was well

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<sup>119</sup> Semmler, 'Benedictus II', pp. 50-1.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. De Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery'.



underway, the step to monasteries serving as prisons for outsiders was but a small one; and once monastic stability and humility came to be viewed as a means of punishing and disciplining rebellious aristocrats, imprisonment *in monasterio* provided rulers with an instrument for maintaining public order.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CHILDREN AS GIFTS: A CONCLUSION

What did parents donating their children 'to God in the monastery' actually get out of it? This has been the crucial problem in the discussion on child oblation. It has also remained the most elusive issue, for, being clothed in the idiom of Latin charters and clerical treatises, parental motives can only be reconstructed indirectly and incompletely. Modern historians have favoured two apparently opposite explanations: the donor expected either economic gain, ridding himself of superfluous offspring through an overtly pious act, or spiritual rewards. Both explanations are problematic at best, for they interpret early medieval practice in terms of later ideas and attitudes. The 'economic' approach is based on contemporary considerations, treating the religious phrases of the sources as no more than a pious cover-up of a calculated transaction. At the same time, the 'religious' explanation tends to take the language of charters and ideological treatises entirely at face-value, stressing the archaic 'otherness' of early medieval religious beliefs. On the surface, these explanations appear to be diametrically opposed, but in fact they have much in common. Both interpretations emphasise the aspect of *quid pro quo*, be it economic or spiritual. According to the 'religious' explanation, parents nonetheless calculated the rewards of their pious act, for they stood to gain a definite amount of clerical prayer and, ultimately, salvation. In other words, the economic as well as the religious explanation are based on the assumption that gifts to the sacred are never 'free' gifts; a reward of some kind, be it material or spiritual, is the motive force behind gift-giving. Moreover, these apparently mutually exclusive approaches both rigidly separate the domain of the economic from the spiritual.

The *oblatio puerorum* has been treated as an archaic anomaly, precisely because it confounds this type of classification. The gift of a child seems to confuse entities that should be separated by all modern accounts: the supernatural and the human, people and things. And yet, it is precisely this confusion that should be the starting point for any analysis of early medieval gift-giving in general, and child oblation in particular. Categories such as 'economic' or 'religious' could very well

be connected, and even integrated. The modern idea that these domains should be separate has deep roots the past, permeating anthropological and historical theory; some of its history will be charted here, for it provides the backdrop to the problems historians face when interpreting early medieval gift-giving. It is all too easy, however, to go overboard in stressing the otherness of early medieval societies. The grasping cleric as well as the lay donor calculating his rewards are not merely a figment of modern imagination. They also exist in the writing of Carolingian clerics, worried about contaminating the sacred with human greed. This is not surprising, for the very idea that the sacred should not be polluted by commerce is intrinsic to the New Testament, which condemns the money changers in the temple as well as Simon Magus's attempt to purchase the power of grace. Such misgivings, swelling to an indignant chorus at the end of the eleventh century, were merely a sub-current in early medieval societies dependent upon gift exchange. The oblation of children flourished in this context, and it is the perceptions of this world that should serve as a frame of reference for interpreting the gift of a child.

### 1. GIFTS AND 'PURE GIFTS'

For historians writing on medieval gift-giving, Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (1924/25) still remains the anthropological point of departure *par excellence*. When Georges Duby characterised early medieval society as a 'société du don', it was with Mauss in mind;<sup>1</sup> the same holds true for Philip Grierson's classic essay on early medieval commerce.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, both Duby and Grierson strove to emphasise the essential otherness of medieval perceptions concerning gift-giving. This was also in keeping with Mauss, who, in his own words, wanted to write a prehistory of modern economic transactions, investigating past societies where the opposition between purely self-interested exchange and equally 'pure' charity had not yet come into existence.<sup>3</sup> Mauss held up

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<sup>1</sup> Duby, *Guerriers et paysans*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages'; cf. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> This comes out most clearly in Mauss's discussion of 'the survival of these principles in ancient law and ancient economy', these principles being the lack of distinction between 'les droits réels et les droits personnels, les personnes et les

the mirror of alterity to his contemporaries, pointing to societies where gift-giving was always motivated by a mixture of interest and disinterest, and where the distinction between persons and objects was largely irrelevant. Hence, objects could contain the 'spirit of the donor', compelling the recipient to make some kind of return. This controversial notion of the 'spirit of the donor' has become something of a skeleton in the anthropological cupboard, but what it basically amounts to is the notion that gift exchange itself is the very source of a society's cohesion, productiveness and existence. Within this perspective, reciprocity isn't primarily about a give-and-take between individuals. The obligations created by gift exchanges are of a social nature. Without a constant flow of gifts and counter-gifts, society will cease to exist.

Mauss did have an ideological axe to grind, for he was reacting against the sharp contrast between altruism and economic self-interest he perceived and disliked in modern Western culture. 'Charity' as a concomitant of business-like property transactions was only a recent phenomenon, he maintained, and many remnants of the older fusion of persons and objects remained.<sup>4</sup> Opposing the socially binding effects of traditional gift-giving to modern notions that true gifts are free gifts, without any expectation of rewards or obligations, he was obviously working from an evolutionist perspective. Nonetheless, Mauss raised the fundamental issue that perceptions of gift exchange are subject to historical change. This argument has recently been addressed again by Jonathan Parry, who pointed out that the very notion of the 'pure' gift emerged in opposition to – and parallel with – the ideology of the purely interested exchange of the market place; the whole idea of entirely selfless charity depends upon the existence of its counterpart, selfish commercial gain.<sup>5</sup> But this very dichotomy also provides the background to a deeply felt distrust about the purity of gifts, to the extent that any apparently selfless act of largesse tends to be ascribed to ulterior motives: what do they get out of it? Consequently, Mauss's notion of reciprocity between social groups or 'moral persons' has been

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choses', and in his conclusion, where he emphasises elements of an older mentality surviving in contemporary society. Cf. Mauss, *Essai sur le Don*, pp. 228-9, 258-79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229: 'Mais ces distinctions ne sont-elles pas assez récentes dans les droits des grandes civilisations? Celles-ci n'ont-elles pas passé par une phase antérieure, où elles n'avaient pas cette mentalité froide et calculatrice? N'ont-elles pas pratiqué mêmes ces usages du don échangé où fusionnent personnes et choses?'

<sup>5</sup> Parry, 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the "Indian Gift"'.

reinterpreted in terms of individual self-interest. As Parry put it: 'So while Mauss is generally represented as telling us how *in fact* a gift is *never* free, what I think he is really telling us is how *we* have acquired a *theory* that it should be'.<sup>6</sup> Although the *Essai sur le Don* has become an almost sacred text to anthropologists and historians alike, Malinowski's concept of the 'mutual services balance' has proven to be much more influential. After having initially considered unreciprocated gifts as 'pure gifts', Malinowski later changed his mind, stating that gift-exchange was always a dyadic transaction between self-interested individuals; if there was no obvious material *quid pro quo*, he assumed that an increase in status or power compensated for its absence.<sup>7</sup>

In her recent study of gift-giving amongst Oceania peoples Annette Weiner seems to work precisely within this frame of reference, while calling the whole notion of reciprocity into question.<sup>8</sup> In her view the actual gift exchange is but a surface phenomenon, hiding what is really important: the amount of inalienable possessions one manages to hang onto. While all have to comply with the social obligation to be generous, only the really powerful are able to withhold precious goods from circulation. Such goods – be they land rights, material objects or knowledge – usually only become 'inalienable possessions' after having been transmitted from generation to generation. Over time, they become infused with the identity of their successive owners who retain a claim on them even when giving them away. Control of such inalienable possessions indicates social distinction rather than equality; the powerless will lavish more gifts upon the powerful, attempting to enter into a partnership.<sup>9</sup> 'It is, then, not the hoary idea of a return gift that generates the thrust of exchange, but the radiating power of keeping inalienable possessions out of the exchange'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>7</sup> Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, p. 27; Parry, 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the "Indian Gift"', pp. 454-455.

<sup>8</sup> Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43: 'When a Trobriander keeps a famous kula shell, other players seek him out, bestowing upon him other bounty in an attempt to make him into a partner, just as feudal lords through the authority vested in their estates attracted merchants, peasants, and monks. It is not accidental that inalienable possessions represent the oldest economic classification in the world'.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

This approach has the advantage of not covering up the tension and conflict inherent in gift exchange, while taking differences of social status and power into account. There is indeed nothing intrinsically egalitarian about gift-giving. Making gifts to the powerful, be they kings or saints, was one way of locating oneself more closely to the source of power, creating the possibility, but not the certainty, that one would benefit from their capricious generosity. Only the gifts of the powerless were of a predictable nature, whereas those of the powerful could be withheld. Still, Weiner's concept of giving-while-keeping has severe limitations. Though denouncing the 'mutual services balance', she remains in the best Malinowskian tradition by entirely excluding the sacred from her considerations. If giving is actually about keeping, how then does one explain sacrifices? One might argue that the supernatural is by definition supremely powerful, and therefore attracts the most gifts, but this argument is extremely vague. Had medieval donors only made perfunctory gifts to the sacred in order to keep their most valuable belongings, church property would have shrunk to negligible quantities. However, the opposite was true: as Duby expressed it, the flow of gifts of land to the church was 'one of the broadest and most regular economic currents of this period'.<sup>11</sup>

By denouncing the whole idea of reciprocity as an invention of anthropologists thinking in terms of primitive *Gemeinschaft* versus modern *Gesellschaft*,<sup>12</sup> Weiner in fact returns to Malinowski's calculating native. Instead of keeping his beady eye on the mutual services balance, the native now is after the 'radiating power of keeping', while gift-exchange is perceived as an interaction between self-interested individuals rather than between social beings or groups. Thus, the notion of gifts shaping and changing social relations somehow disappears from view. Similar perceptions permeate historical writing on gifts to the sacred, with clerical prayer being depicted as a commodity 'purchased' by the laity with their gifts to the clergy.<sup>13</sup> The rise of the votive masses is a case in point. Arnold Angenendt's seminal article on *missae speciales* is too subtle to cast either clergy or laity in the role of the

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<sup>11</sup> Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, pp. 28-33.

<sup>13</sup> Magnou-Nortier, *La société laïque et l'Eglise dans la province ecclésiastique de Narbonne*, p. 141; Iogna-Prat, 'La mort dans la comptabilité céleste', p. 67; cf. McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, p. 13.

calculating native, but he nonetheless describes the rapid spread of votive masses as an phenomenon belonging to early medieval 'religion', as opposed to true Christianity. In return for their gifts, the laity could 'order' a specific amount of masses for their very personal salvation, a practice representing a decisive break with the early Christian understanding of the eucharist as a communal ritual.<sup>14</sup>

This interpretation of early medieval votive masses as yet another instance of *quid pro quo* has recently been challenged by Megan McLaughlin's study of prayer for the dead. She doubts whether votive masses were as important as a reward for gifts to the church as has been argued; her analysis of a large sample of charters reveals that the laity used gifts to build long-term connections (*familiaritas*) with religious houses, rather than stipulating a specific amount of prayer in return for their generosity. The charter evidence does not support the assumption that there was a strict accounting for grace, for prayer mentioned in fewer than 20% of the documents dating from before the eleventh century. Generally, the charters remain quite vague about the amount of masses or psalms the donors could expect in return for their gifts.<sup>15</sup> Apparently such precise calculations were much less relevant than establishing one's proximity to the saints through a series of donations, often kept up over generations: 'The liturgical return gift seems to be an outgrowth of the donor's relationship of *familiaritas* with the community that prayed, rather than a response to a particular gift'.<sup>16</sup> Only in the second half of the eleventh century did gifts demanding commodities as a *quid pro quo* definitely increase, signalling the incorporation of traditional modes of gift-exchange into new economic patterns.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Angenendt, 'Missae speciales', pp. 171-85, 212-21.

<sup>15</sup> McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 154-6, 164-70; see also Appendix B, Table 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150. As for the specific numbers of masses or psalters mentioned in Carolingian sources concerning confraternities of prayer and 'tariffed' penance, these might well be connected with the prevailing aesthetics of numbers, carrying a symbolic rather than a literal meaning; *ibid.*, pp. 239-44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167; cf. Rosenwein, *To be a Neighbour to Saint Peter*, pp. 205-6, who noted that from 1040 onwards, the monks of Cluny began to offer liturgical rewards in return for lands they wished to add to their property. These changes were not drastic ones, however; as Bouchard explained (*Holy Entrepreneurs*, pp. 87-94) twelfth-century Cistercian monks and their donors effortlessly integrated gift-exchange into the growing market economy. I am grateful to Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld for his pertinent comments concerning this issue.

The crux of the matter is the social fabric created by donations, rather than the intrinsic value of the 'commodities' exchanged. The rewards of gifts to the sacred were not to be calculated in terms of the quantitative value of the exchange objects, but rather evaluated within the context of the partnership between donor and recipient. Gifts yielded more intractable and 'relational' rewards, such as the enhancement of the social and moral status of the donor, his membership of the 'community of the altar', which consisted of all those who prayed for and gave to a particular saint and, above all, *familiaritas* with the sacred.<sup>18</sup> Barbara Rosenwein reached similar conclusions in her excellent study of land donations to Cluny. A gift of property to the monastery might yield all kinds of social, economic, and religious benefits, but the main aim of the operation was to become 'the neighbour of Saint Peter'. Her research reveals the same principle of 'return of the fruit', which governed early medieval child oblation. Since all land came from God, men were obliged to return some of this wealth; gifts to the sacred were therefore by definition countergifts, albeit not of a reciprocal kind.<sup>19</sup> Addressing the perennial question what donors exactly got out of their gifts to Cluny, Rosenwein concludes: 'There is no need, therefore, to invoke prayers or entrance in the confraternity or burial in Cluny's grounds to explain donations to Cluny. The social meaning of gift giving alone is enough'.<sup>20</sup> The *pro anima* formula used in the charters conveys an impression of *do-ut-des*, but this did not necessarily imply any equality in the partnership created. On the contrary, gifts served to create familiarity with supernatural powers; the more powerful they were perceived to be, the less likely they were to be manipulated through a simple mechanism of give-and-take. Characteristically, early medieval parents vowing their children to religious life in order to procure a specific reward preferably addressed themselves to the saints, rather than to an omnipotent and distant deity.

And what of the principle of keeping-while-giving? Land could indeed be donated to Cluny and returned again as a precarial gift, meaning that the donor and his family retained some claim on what was initially their property. But these overlapping claims are not so much an expression of 'the radiating power of keeping inalienable possessions out

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-5.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbour of Saint Peter*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.



of the exchange' as a strategy to sustain an ongoing *familiaritas* with the sacred.

This approach is closer to the heart of the matter than the assumption of a mechanistic *quid pro quo*, but through emphasising the 'positive' aspects of gift exchange, it also tends to play down certain evidence to the contrary. As I wrote earlier, the calculating native not only exists in the mind of modern anthropologists (or historians, for that matter), but may also be encountered in early medieval sources. Clerical authors sincerely worried about votive masses drawing the faithful away from communal mass; they severely criticised grasping colleagues eager to present themselves as the only effective mediators between God and mankind.<sup>21</sup> Carolingian reformers particularly were sensitive to the moral dangers of calculating behaviour on the part of the clergy, warning bishops and abbots that gifts elicited by pressure or under false pretences would bring nothing but mishap to the recipients. There is more than a whiff of New Testament ethos to Carolingian reform ideology, in that gift-exchange for personal gain was definitely frowned upon, especially if the sacred was involved. It was one thing to expect saints to reward those who entrusted themselves to their patronage, even to the extent of punishing and humiliating those saints who failed to reciprocate; it was quite another, however, to expect a calculated *quid pro quo* from sacred patrons. This hesitation to demand precise rewards from the sacred may well have influenced the language of the donation charters, in that vague *pro remedio animae* formulas left plenty of room for saints and clergy to extend their generosity to the donor without the latter appearing to be asking too much.

In other words, the present-day distinction between 'free' and 'self-interested' gifts is not entirely anachronistic when it comes to interpret-

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<sup>21</sup> Jonas, *De institutione laicali*, III, c. 15, col. 264: 'Nullatenus itaque audiendi sunt illi, qui dicunt quod nullae aliae eleemosynae opitulari possint defunctis, nisi solummodo quae sacerdotibus dantur, et sacrificia quae per eos Deo offeruntur. Hoc qui credunt et dicunt, aut ignorantia, aut certe aliorum persuasione falluntur. Credibile sane est quod hoc persuasio, qua simplices id credere et dicere videntur, ex fonte avaritiae processerit'; Heito, *Visio Wettini* c. 7, p. 270: 'Sacerdotum', inquit angelus, 'maxima pars mundanis lucris inhiando et palatinis curis inserviando, cultu vestium et pompa ferculorum se extollendo quaestum putant esse pietatem. Animabus lucrando in invigilant, deliciis affluentes in scorta prouunt; et ita evenit, ut nec sibi nec aliis intercessores esse possint. (...) Et ideo tali remuneratione in fine donantur, quia praecedentibus meritis talia patiuntur'.

ing early medieval attitudes towards gift exchange. It is a matter of degree, rather than of absolute distinctions; the notion that money lenders should be kept out of the temple coexisted with the perception of gifts being (and creating) social and religious obligations. Early medieval sources on gift-giving confront the modern reader with a curious mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The societies in which they originated were no pure gift economies, for commerce and commodity exchange did play a role, albeit a relatively marginal one. Subsequently, Carolingian authors such as Amalarius of Metz did distinguish between 'free' gifts and those demanding a counter-gift, but they did so without condemning the principle of reciprocity;<sup>22</sup> after all, most transactions in their society were based on gifts creating or reaffirming social relationships. On the surface, Carolingian diatribes against clerics amassing ill-gotten gains by misleading a gullible laity sound almost modern, or at least reminiscent of later reformers' prose. But it was not the principle of reciprocity itself that they criticised, being as adamant about the necessity for almsgiving and sacrifice as about the subsequent rewards. The Christian ideology which proclaimed gifts to the sacred as a means of salvation fitted in perfectly with a society which perceived voluntary largesse as a sign of power, and the inability to give as a mark of social inferiority. Attacks on the abuse of donations to the church therefore derived their vocabulary from the idiom of the gift economy, favouring the communal and legal aspects of gift-exchange while denouncing attempts at individual gain.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Amalarius, *Expositio missae 'Dominus vobiscum'*, c. 27, p. 306, distinguishes between *dona*, 'free' gifts without expectation of reward, *munera*, gifts either responding to or provoking a counter-gift, *sacrificia* which are sanctified by prayer and *vota* resulting from a specific promise. Cf. Angenendt, *Missa specialis*, p. 182. See also Amalarius, *Liber officialis*, III, c. 19, 6, p. 321-3, which emphasises the legal obligation to sacrifice: 'Docti sumus veteri testamento pro quibus offerre debeamus sacrificia, scilicet pro votis, pro spontaneis, pro peccato, pro regno, pro sanctuario, pro Iuda. Quando adimplemus ea quae in tribulatione promissimus, pro votis facimus; quando gratias agimus de perceptis, pro spontaneis; quando compungimur de commissis, pro peccato; quando recta corde petimus regibus, pro regno; quando stabilitatem sacrorum graduum, pro sanctuario; quando pacem et unanimiorem populi, pro Iuda'.

<sup>23</sup> So much is clear from texts presenting relic-trade as a form of theft with the saint co-operating in his 'transfer' to another shrine. Cf. Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 15, 66; Cohen, *Gift, Payment and the Sacred*, pp. 7-8. Even in the twelfth and thirteenth century, when the money economy as well as the pilgrimage industry was booming,

Time and again, false dichotomies seem to be the problem. Just as 'the gift economy' has been too rigidly opposed to 'the market economy', free gifts have been contrasted with self-interest. Parry may be right when stating that the ideal of the pure gift was strongest in world religions flourishing in a market economy,<sup>24</sup> but by opposing world religions to 'tribal religions' favouring gift-exchange, yet another conceptual pitfall is created. At best, these are useful abstractions; that is, if they are perceived as two ends of a continuum that never exists in any pure form. This is not to say that these perceptions of what consisted selfishness or altruism have remained the same in the course of the middle ages. But change was never so drastic or complete that older attitudes disappeared altogether; it was rather a matter of geological layers pressing into each other, creating new patterns without entirely abandoning older structures.<sup>25</sup> The notion of the 'free gift' as opposed to calculated commodity exchange became mainstream thinking in later periods, but it also represented a substantial subcurrent in early medieval thinking, not to be neglected for the sake of historiographical clarity and tidiness.

Early medieval gifts to the sacred seem to have resulted from a variable combination of interest and altruism. The same must have held true for gift exchange between humans, for that matter. Moreover, in the course of the developing relationship between gift partners, the initial give-and-take between strangers may have changed into a familiarity allowing no expectation of a return. As Valeri observed about gift-giving practices in Eastern Indonesia, prospective husbands may win their brides by lavish gifts to their in-laws, but once they have become part of the family, the days of *do-ut-des* are over. 'There is no book-keeping among relatives and thus there can be no true reciprocity'.<sup>26</sup> Valeri rightly stresses the dynamic nature of gift-exchange, situating it in a

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the clerics tending the shrines refused to deal with the commercial aspects of pilgrimage, leaving the profits to be reaped by others; they viewed matters in terms of the traditional gift-giving relationship between pilgrim and shrine. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>24</sup> Parry, 'The Gift, the Indian Gift and the "Indian Gift"', pp. 466-469.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Gift, Payment and the Sacred*, p. 6: 'Patterns of lay piety existent in the early middle ages became overlaid by newer phenomena, but did not disappear. Much as geological layers will press into each other, creating new patterns of mountains and mixed rock layers, so the older perceptions of piety and economy surface through the new phenomena time and again'.

<sup>26</sup> Valeri, 'Buying women but not selling them', p. 6.

continuum between commodity exchange and altruism. What began as barter between strangers may develop into reciprocal gift-giving, which in due time will turn exchange partners into friends or relatives. In course of this process, the need for book-keeping is gradually reduced.

Similar dynamics were at work in early medieval dealings with the sacred. Saints could initially be powerful strangers, enemies even, who could be turned into patrons, neighbours and friends; once a relationship of familiarity was established, the element of give-and-take became less prominent. The persistent practice of humiliating 'deficient' saints shows that notions of reciprocity was never quite absent, however. They were part and parcel of a society which clearly identified its *cognati et amici*, to the exclusion of all others. Obedience of the precept to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mt 22, 39) may have hinged upon the precise definition of what consisted a 'neighbour' (*proximus*). Significantly, Leviticus – so dear to early medieval clerics – puts the love of neighbours in a limited context: refraining from revenge against one's own people.<sup>27</sup> Gift-exchange guaranteed the maintenance and expansion of the vital circle of insiders, friends and allies; those neglecting their duties to give were relegated to the domain of outsiders or enemies. When gift-giving matters for survival, it is never indiscriminate; the same goes for early medieval child oblation.

## 2. WHO CONTROLLED THE GIFTS?

Whenever Carolingian clerics looked for biblical ammunition to support sacrifices, they turned to the Old Testament. Its precepts were tailor-made for the ideological defence of the early medieval gift economy. The offering of the first fruit, the firstborn, holocausts and other sacrifices all served as a legitimation for a range of oblations, from children and tithes to gifts brought during the Offertory. Within the Carolingian body politic, clergy and laity played complementary roles: while the former prayed, the latter gave. In the minds of Carolingian churchmen like Amalarius of Metz, celebration of mass had become intricately connected with the political order: whenever the faithful brought their sacrifices to the altar, they did so not only for personal

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<sup>27</sup> Lv 19, 18: 'Non quaeres ultionem nec irasceris civibus tuis. Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum. Ego Dominus'.

salvation, but also for the wellbeing of the king and the realm, the maintenance of a well-functioning clergy (*stabilitas sacrum graduum*) and the peace and unanimity of the people.<sup>28</sup>

Amalarius may have been right, not only from an ideological but also from an economic point of view, for gift-giving was an important channel for circulating goods, and as much an economic basis of the state as other forms of exchange.<sup>29</sup> The Carolingian economy was a mixed affair, in that money and local markets flourished within a larger context of a gift economy. To a certain extent, commodity exchange was clothed in the guise and language of gift-giving: when the ruler received his *fideles* for the annual assembly, they brought their lord and king 'gifts' (*dona*). In doing so, they did not have much of a choice, for the regularity of the annual gifts made them into an institutionalised imposition, to be payed in cash, bullion and kind.<sup>30</sup> As long as this duty was discharged in the guise of voluntary generosity, however, honour was preserved. With commodity exchange increasing and traditional values needing reaffirmation, the time-honoured ideal of personalised gift-exchange was likely to assume an even greater importance. This kind of ideological conservatism may well have played a part in the Carolingian discourse on gift-exchange. Whatever the case, the gifts of the faithful (in both senses of the word: *fideles* and worshippers) still made up an important part of the economic resources at the disposal of ninth-century kings. Control of the wealth of churches and royal monasteries had been a crucial step on the road to kingship for the Carolingian dynasty in the making, and it remained an equally important tool for maintaining power. Later monarchs continued to use resources adroitly for rewarding their *fideles* and supporting their armies. If the laity stopped giving, royal power was directly threatened.

One of the central issues in early medieval politics, therefore, is the question of who controlled the gifts. In the past, the problem has often been treated in a disapproving fashion, in which any lay control of ecclesiastical resources was considered a usurpation of clerical prerogative. As historians have recently realised, this was not the view of Carolingian ecclesiastical leaders themselves. As long as kings adequately protected monasteries and gave freely to religious foundations, they

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<sup>28</sup> See above, n. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Morris, 'Gift and commodity in Ancient Greece'.

<sup>30</sup> Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, pp. 49-50.

were accorded the right to material and spiritual countergifts. Naturally, when kings overstepped the boundaries of propriety, vociferous quarrels followed. Nonetheless, bishops and abbots generally accepted royal use of their resources, and even took a certain pride in thus supporting public power. Hincmar, who otherwise minced no words when it came to reminding Charles the Bald of his duties towards the church, proudly wrote to the pope to inform him that he, Hincmar, regularly supplied military aid to the king.<sup>31</sup>

The occasional uproar over royal high-handedness with church property created a flurry of indignant clerical prose, which provides illuminating insights in the Carolingian clergy's 'gift ideology'. At a synod held in Aachen in 837, for example, the bishops took Pippin I of Aquitaine to task for forcing ecclesiastical landowners to lease out property in return for set rents. Given the fact that such precarial grants were nothing out of the ordinary, this sudden cracking down on Pippin may also have served the purposes of Louis the Pious; forbidding precarial grants was an effective way of undermining his son's power base in Aquitaine. The strategy succeeded, for already in the same year Pippin restored their former rights to several churches.<sup>32</sup> He did so in response to an extensive letter drafted by the angry bishops, reminding him of his duties as a benefactor of the church.

This curious document reads as a treatise on gift-giving, Carolingian style. Its authors presented themselves as the king's *fidelissimi oratores*,<sup>33</sup> going on at great length about the property of God procuring the king's personal salvation as well as the stability of the realm; they reminded Pippin that all earthly kingdoms and all fruits of the land were in fact a gift from God, who commanded David to make sacrifices to His temple.<sup>34</sup> The episcopal argument revolved around the crucial theme of the *ius sacerdotum*. Not only were gifts to God to be inviolable, at the peril of damnation or death, but they were to remain firmly

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<sup>31</sup> Hincmar, *Epistolae*, MGH Epp. VIII, 1, no. 198, p. 206; Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, p. 58; eadem, 'The Church's Military Service', pp. 128-32.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, 'Pippin I and the kingdom of Aquitaine', pp. 370-2.

<sup>33</sup> *Epistola concilii Aquisgranensis*, prol., p. 730.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 4, p. 731: 'Primum quidem, quod omnia terrarum regna et omnia bona terrae Domini sint et ex suis sua sibi offerantur, ex verbis David, regum sanctissimi et prophetarum eximii, post autem, quod Deus sua sive ante legem sive in lege et ad sanctuarium et ad templum sanctum suum iusserit offerri, conabimur demonstrare'.

in the hands of 'the priests and other ministers of God' who were to use the gifts for the sustenance of the poor.<sup>35</sup> Bits and pieces from the Book of Numbers were glued together to make up a sentence like the following: 'The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: all the first fruits of the earth offered by the children of Israel belong to the priest; and whatever is offered to the temple by individuals and given into the hands of the priests, will be His'.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the bishops' ulterior political motives may have been, theirs was the language of a corporate body identifying with Old Testament priesthood, defending their control of sacrifices to the temple. The bishops had the right to dispose of the gifts of the faithful, be they obligatory or voluntary.<sup>37</sup>

In a more peaceful and co-operative mood, the same bishops might well have stressed Pippin's role as a benefactor and protector of the church, for in this respect he had a deservedly good reputation. But generous kings could easily turn into the 'oppressors of the poor'; in the early medieval gift economy, these were the two faces of the powerful.<sup>38</sup> Possibly the clerical claims to the gifts to the sacred had decided advantages for rulers, in that such resources remained inviolable to all but themselves. After all, the very notion of the poor being the rightful

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 24, pp. 736-7: 'Unde hodie quoque Christiana religio, exemplum sumens ex antiqua patrum traditione, domos in honorem Dei aedificat ac dedicat, et altaria erigit eisque oleum superfundit ac sacrosancto christmate ea perungit et de factis dictisque eiusdem Iacob moelodia Christo canit et a fidelibus oblationes et vota et pretiosarum diversarumque rerum ad decorem et honorem divini cultus, sacerdotum ceterorumque ministrorum Christi usus pauperumque receptionem ac recreationem suscipit donaria'.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 34, p. 741: 'Locutus est Dominus ad Moysen dicens: Loquere filiis Israhel: Omnes primitiae, quas offerunt filii Israhel, ad sacerdotem pertinent; et quicquid ad sanctuarium offertur a singulis et traditur manibus sacerdotis, ipsius erit'.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 37, p. 745: 'His verbis patenter intellegi datur, quod omnia, quae ex muneribus precipua et pretiosa sunt, sibi Dominus voluerit offerri et quod, si ea, sive quae Dominus precepit, sive ea, quae eius populus sua sponte offerre voluisset, non alibi nisi in loco, quem Dominus elegisset, ut esset nomen eius in eo, offerri iubebantur, procul dubio ea, quae ecclesiae sanctae sunt conlata, non alienis, sed eiusdem ecclesiae sunt usibus applicanda'. For Carolingian priests comparing themselves to their Old Testament predecessors, cf. Theodulf, *Capitulare II*, c. VIII, 4, p. 170.

<sup>38</sup> *Epistola concilii Aquisgranensis*, II, c. 11, p. 751: 'Ergo offerentes sunt Domino oboedientes, auferentes vero procul dubio extant ei inoboedientes atque repugnantes. Cavendumque est illis, ne propter suam inoboedientiam, immo cupiditatem peccatum et scelus, quod ipse Samuhel commemorat, incurrant'.

beneficiaries of sacrifices to God implied an official and organised ecclesiastical control, barring the aristocracy as well as individual clerics from using church lands as a personal power base.<sup>39</sup> If kings manoeuvred carefully and within reasonable limits, the monopoly of tapping ecclesiastical wealth was theirs.

Characteristically, the bulk of biblical evidence for this treatise came from the Old Testament. Only at the very end did the bishops turn to the New Testament, but even then they were forced to supplement the rather meagre results with quotations from Jerome and other church fathers. The Old Testament held pride of place: all the classic texts legitimating child oblation were used to the full, including Abraham and Isaac,<sup>40</sup> the return of the fruit,<sup>41</sup> the gift of the firstborn,<sup>42</sup> and, of course, Hannah and Samuel.<sup>43</sup> The episcopal argument reveals how very accepted the consecration of children had become by the 830s. If kings went too far in spoliating land, bishops could call them to order, saying as much as: you would not do the same to children consecrated to God, would you? Familiar themes abound. Nobody was capable of giving anything to God which had not been previously received from His hand.<sup>44</sup> If the Lord tolerated no disobedience when demanding that part of the material bounty conferred upon man be returned in the form of sacrifice, how will those refusing to do so be able to face the divine precept to offer themselves or their sons as a holocaust?<sup>45</sup> The bishops repeatedly

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<sup>39</sup> Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, p. 57; eadem, 'Charles the Bald and the Church'.

<sup>40</sup> *Epistola concilii Aquisgranensis*, I, c. 19, pp. 734-5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 4, p. 731; c. 9, p. 732.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 24-25, p. 737-8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, II, c. 5, p. 748-9. However, Jephta and his daughter were not mentioned.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 9, p. 732: 'Et quod nemo Deo quicquam offerre valet nisi ea, quae de manu eius accepit, et quod Dominus de his, quae dedit, sibi pretiosa quaeque suoque sancto nomini sacratis locis offerri non abnuit, immo oblatis delectatur et oblata auferri non patitur. Nam his et aliis divinarum scripturarum verbis luce clarius extat manifestum, quod ea, quae Dominus sibi offerri iussit, ad cultum sanctuarii templique sui et ad usum sacerdotum Levitarumque omnino cedere voluerit. Et sicut in votis sponte offerentium laetatur, ita in non offerentium vel etiam quoquo quoquosmodo auferre temptantium transgressionibus periculum interminatur mortis, sicut in sequentibus demonstrabitur'; *ibid.*, c. 4, p. 731 (see above, n. 34).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 20, p. 735: 'Deus itaque, sicut iam supra dictum est, si ea, quae dedit, sibi suisque sacratis locis iubet offerre et ea quidam auferre non pertimescunt, quid facerent hi, rogo, si Deus illis aut semetipsos aut filios suos sibi in holocaustum iuberet offerre? Certe credendum est, quod, sicut in offerendis sacratis rebus Deo inoboedientes existunt, ita nihilominus in offerendis semetipsis aut filiis suis



referred to consecration of people to make their point about the inviolability of material gifts to God. According to Lv 27, 28, whatever was consecrated to God – be it man, animal or land – belonged forever to Him; as the bishops warned, ‘read also in this text the Lord’s precept about a man consecrated to him, and realise that men have been ordered to be consecrated to the Lord’.<sup>46</sup> If Hannah has been blessed for offering her son Samuel, those who attempt to steal sacrifices should beware: their children would not only be damned, but even extinguished.<sup>47</sup>

The bishops’ classification of gifts followed the broad divide of spontaneous and obligatory ones.<sup>48</sup> There were others, such as Amalarius, who distinguished more precisely between donations without any expectation of reward (*dona*), gifts serving as counter-gifts and therefore creating the obligation of a reward (*munera*), gifts to be consecrated by prayer (*sacrificia*) and gifts resulting from promises made in an earlier predicament (*vota*).<sup>49</sup> One way or another, all these aspects of gift-giving played some role in early medieval perceptions of child oblation. The sacrifice of a child could be a legal duty, so that withholding a gift could bring God’s wrath upon the negligent donor; conversely, it could be the result of spontaneous promises made with the hope of immediate reward. Whatever the case, such human gifts also belonged to the *ius sacerdotum*, becoming an inalienable part of the corporate body of Carolingian priesthood.

### 3. CHILDREN AS *HOLOCAUSTA*

Traditionally, the debate on child oblation centered upon its juridical aspects. Some scholars took Roman law and the concept of *patria potestas* for the source of Benedict’s irrevocable version of child

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inoboedientes existerent’.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 32, p. 741: ‘Vide etiam in hoc loco, quid de homine sibi consecrato Dominus precipiat, et perpende, quod homines consecrari precipiantur Domino’.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, II, c. 5, p. 749: ‘Si pro filio et hostiis Deo oblatis Anna benedici et spiritum prophetiae et sobolem meruit adipisci, cavendum illis est, qui hostias ab aliis Deo oblatas auferunt, ut non solum maledictionem, sed etiam extinctionem filiorum suorum incurrant, sicuti quosdam incurrisse non ambigimus’.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, I, c. 9, p. 732 (see above, n. 44); cc. 35-36, pp. 742-3.

<sup>49</sup> See above, n. 22.

oblation; others, who doubted or denied that the Rule left children no choice whatsoever, held Germanic law responsible for the legal constraint of the parental vow. Whatever the case, the crucial issue was one of legal obligations. But one matter was never discussed: who could enforce the 'law' compelling child oblates to remain in the monastery? There was no public authority to chase back runaways in Benedict's age. If child oblation was irrevocable, it was because all parties concerned were willing to honour the gift to God: the parents, the monastic community and the children themselves. In the early medieval kingdoms, however, those wielding political power became increasingly involved with the welfare of monastic communities, forcing recalcitrant child oblates back into the cloister. In Merovingian times such disciplinary action was mainly a matter for bishops, but in the Visigothic realm conciliar legislation found its way into secular law: vows to God had become the concern of kings. Carolingian authorities elaborated upon this tradition, building a veritable corpus of rules and regulations for their armies of prayer. To a much larger extent than ever before, Carolingian rulers relied upon monasteries, which is why child oblation became a matter of concern in royal legislation.

This is not to say that public power was always effective in keeping child oblates confined to the cloister. As Smaragdus wrote, in his day and age flight occurred 'very frequently';<sup>50</sup> we can only take him at his word, guessing at the fate of these runaways. But one thing is certain: whenever kings, bishops or abbots took action, it was neither on the basis of Roman nor of Germanic law. On the contrary, they invoked the *vetus lex* of the Old Testament, building their argument upon the inviolability of gifts and the *ius sacerdotum*. When rebels like Gottschalk and Lambert attempted to retrieve their inheritance, it was precisely these 'priestly' rights they were up against.

As Pippin of Aquitaine found out to his dismay, ecclesiastical property rights were certainly not identical with royal prerogative. Still, kings upheld the *ius sacerdotum*, so the interests of rulers and clergy converged. However, the legal enforcement of child oblation's irrevocable consequences was not only a matter of public authority. At the most basic level, the constraints of personal obligation and local society were at work. If holding back on gifts between humans was considered dishonourable, this certainly held true for a solemn oblation at the altar.

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<sup>50</sup> Smaragdus, *Expositio*, c. 59, p. 301.

Oblates leaving the monastery must have given their parents a lot of grief, not to mention the loss of face and status, endangering relations between the family and the recipient monastic community. On another level, however, since those running the Carolingian state viewed it as a matter for *correctio*, the irreversibility of child oblation had become a public affair. On both the personal and the public levels, securing the flow of gifts was the crucial motive. Personal honour and status were at stake if one failed to reciprocate gifts or reneged on promises to give; similarly, those formulating precepts for child oblation based themselves on the principle of the inviolability of gifts. In written form, a 'law of gifts' could be found in the Old Testament; it was elaborated upon in documents like the episcopal letter to Pippin of Aquitaine and biblical and liturgical commentary.

Above all, it was articulated through the wording of countless charters recording donations to the church. Though most of these are concerned with land, there are important similarities between a donation of land and the gift of a child. Both contained an element of *quid pro quo* as well as the notion that God demanded unconditional sacrifice. Unlike objects being given away, land and children remained present as a visible reminder of the donor's generosity, establishing an enduring channel of communication with the supernatural *potentes* and their monastic mediators. But there were also differences: land once given could be subject to overlapping and conflicting claims; it could be parcelled out, passed on as a gift or even sold. In other words, its status varied over time, ranging from a pious gift to an object of sale. Conversely, children were consecrated and thus transformed, once and for all, into a 'holocaust for the Lord'.

Unlike sin and guilt offerings, the Old Testament concept of the wholly-burnt offering left nothing to eat for the priests; in this respect, the holocaust was the opposite of sacrifices like the first fruits and tithes, where nothing at all was burned, everything becoming a priestly possession.<sup>51</sup> The New Testament radically broke with this sacrificial ethos, for the only holocaust considered worthy of God was the gift of self; the very life of a devout Christian was his holocaust to the Lord. It was in this spirit that Gregory the Great commented on the words *ibi lavabant holocaustum* (Ez 40,38). All holocausts were sacrifices, he said, but not all sacrifices were holocausts, for the latter implied that nothing

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<sup>51</sup> Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, pp. 13-21.

whatsoever was held back.<sup>52</sup> 'There are some who keep nothing to themselves, but sacrifice their senses, their language, their life and every possession they have acquired to the Almighty God. What else do these people offer but a holocaust, indeed rather becoming a holocaust themselves?'<sup>53</sup>

The notion of *holocaustum* as an unreserved gift of oneself – devoting one's life to God – also entered Carolingian theology, if only because commentators like Hrabanus Maurus incorporated Gregory's work into their own exegesis. But there was also a decisive shift in emphasis, revealing itself in small details such as Hrabanus changing the words *omne quod vivit* ('all that lives') to *omne quod vovit* ('all that he vows').<sup>54</sup> For Hrabanus, keeping one's vows was the thing that mattered most; his treatise against Gottschalk is one long diatribe against those who renege on former promises of generosity. As for the concept of *holocaustum* as a gift of oneself, Hrabanus merely referred to Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, prefiguring Christ who carried the Cross himself. In this passage, the gift of self consists of obedience to parental authority rather than of personal initiative.<sup>55</sup> In a similar vein, Hrabanus discussed the evangelical equivalent of Abraham's holocaust of Isaac: parents giving up their children to God, and children obeying their parents and their parents' vows.<sup>56</sup>

The notion of Christian life itself embodying the only worthy holocaust had receded into the background. It was never quite absent, of course, if only because monastic obedience was interpreted as a personal

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, II, no. 8, c. 16, p. 348: 'Sciendum vero est quia inter sacrificium atque holocaustum distat, quod omne holocaustum sacrificium est, sed non omne sacrificium holocaustum'.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Et sunt quidem qui nihil sibimetipsis reservant, sed sensum, linguam, vitam atque substantiam quam perceperunt omnipotenti Domino immolant. Quid isti nisi holocaustum offerunt, imo magis holocaustum fiunt?'

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Cum vero omne quod habet, omne quod vivit [vovit, Hraban.], omne quod sapit, omnipotenti Deo voverit, holocaustum est'.

<sup>55</sup> Hrabanus, *Liber de oblatione*, col. 423-4: 'Denique Isaac fidelis Dei cultor, atque paternae voluntatis devotissimus executor, typus illius de quo dicit Apostolus: "Factus obediens Patri usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis": idcirco portavit ligna ad conficiendum de semetipso holocaustum, ut Christum exprimeret portantem crucem ad peragendum passionis suae sacramentum'.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 423: 'Idem ergo Dominus, qui tunc oraculo suo iusserat patriarcham offerre filium suum in holocaustum, nunc in Evangelio suo iubet plebem ecclesiasticam sobolem suam tradere ad servitium sanctum ...'.

sacrifice to God.<sup>57</sup> But given the fact that only an elite of religious specialists was able to perform this type of holocaust, the emphasis shifted towards the sacrifice of one's earthly possessions, be it land, mobilia or children. Generosity had become one of the laity's main religious functions. According to the criteria outlined by Gregory the Great, their gifts could only rate as sacrifices, not as proper holocausts, for rather than themselves, they gave of their riches. However, such distinctions had faded away in the Carolingian age. Little was retained of the Old Testament contrast between wholly burnt offerings (leaving nothing for the priests) and other kinds of sacrifices, except consensus about the holocaust's radical nature: nothing was to be kept back. In the episcopal letter of 837, therefore, holocausts incongruously could be harnessed to the cause of the *ius sacerdotum* and ecclesiastical property rights; as the bishops rather obviously put it, holocausts had been sacrificed upon the altar, not elsewhere, and therefore belonged to the priests.<sup>58</sup>

Unreservedly offered by their parents, oblate children were to be holocausts to God, in due course turning the parental oblation into a gift of self through a life of obedience: this was the Carolingian concept of child oblation. It gained ground slowly, competing with other practices such as commendation, fosterage and temporary residence in monasteries. These institutions never quite disappeared, and neither were they entirely incompatible with child oblation. Ties of loyalty developed between oblates and their educators, just as they would have if the child had been commended to a secular or clerical patron. There was quite a difference, however, between Wilfrid of York educating his charges for a choice between the court and the monastery,<sup>59</sup> and Carolingian abbots receiving children at the altar. Unlike those temporarily educated within the monastic world, oblates were consecrated to become God's inalienable possessions through a solemn public ritual. This human holocaust was part and parcel of the sacrificial ideology which grew more pronounced in the second half of the eighth century, destined to become one of the mainstays of the Carolingian state. The connection

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Wollasch, 'Das Mönchsgelübde als Opfer'.

<sup>58</sup> *Epistola concilii Aquisgranensis*, I, c. 14, p. 733: 'Noe quoque, ingentis cataclismi periculo, Domine se protegente, liberatus eoque iubente de arca egressus, non extra altare, sed iam super altare ob liberationem sui holocausta Deo optulit ...'. Cf. *ibid.*, I, c. 20, p. 735.

<sup>59</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 21, p. 44.

between state-building and sacrificing was not one of conscious manipulation, but rather the result of this particular state having originated in a society eager to communicate with the supernatural. Sacrifice being one of the main ways of doing so, it assumed paramount importance; the deposition of donation charters onto the altar as well as the oblation of children were both instances of this 'spirit of sacrifice'. Participation of the laity in such acts of gift-giving was highly valued by all concerned. Significantly, in an age when the altar precinct was becoming increasingly out-of-bounds for the laity, parents – and certainly fathers – were still allowed near the altar when offering a child or depositing a charter on the altar. This pattern was to change in the course of time. In Cluny's *Liber Tramitis*, composed between 1027 and 1040, part of the parental role was assumed by a monk; he had to hand over the child at the altar on the parents' behalf.<sup>60</sup> By that time, the altar precinct had become out of bounds to the laity, to the extent that child oblation had to be performed through a clerical intermediary. Given Carolingian ideas on the purity of the sacred and the *ius sacerdotum*, this was perhaps a logical development, but it was also a far cry from the direct involvement of the laity propagated in Hildemar's oblation ritual.

In the course of the ninth century, child oblation became institutionalised, necessitating the elaboration of a theory of education. The holocaust was not to be polluted: the purity of these children should be guarded by an upbringing under *custodia* and *disciplina*, ensuring isolation from the outside world. Monasteries were embedded in a network of social, economic and political relations, however, so the isolation of child oblates from the wicked world outside remained problematic at best. Monastic sources produced something like a discourse of separation, insisting on the traditional motive of the *conversio* – the radical break with the world and all that it stands for, including family ties. Gregory the Great set the hagiographical tone with his story of a young oblate coming to grief because he was 'too enamoured of his parents'.<sup>61</sup> In many ways, child oblation was con-

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<sup>60</sup> *Liber tramitis*, II, c. 155, 227-8; about this oblation ritual, see Lahaye-Geusen, *Das Opfer der Kinder*, pp. 46-57.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* II, c. 24, vol. II, p. 210: 'Quadam quoque die, dum quidam eius puerulus monachus, parentes suos ultra quam debebat diligens, atque ad eorum habitaculum tendens, sine benedictione de monasterio exisset ...'.

version in an institutionalised form, the only difference being that the child had never really been 'of the world', while his conversion to monastic life took the shape of a gradual interiorisation of a specific code of behaviour. But when distance needs to be emphasised so strongly, it means that closeness is the problem. To the families allying themselves with the sacred through the gift of a child it must have been important that this child continued to be recognised as their offspring. Only by belonging to a spiritual as well as a secular family could the child oblate fulfil his role as a mediator between both worlds. Stories of parents reclaiming children from the monastery indicate that child oblates were also used as strategic gifts, which after due consideration might be better employed outside than inside the monastery.

By distinguishing between these two aspects of child oblation, the social and the religious, I do not intend to add yet another item to the list of dichotomies. Both the ambition to create social alliances in the present and the desire to sacrifice unconditionally to – and thus to communicate with – the supernatural played a role in the donation of a child. This holds true for lay donors as well as for clerical recipients. Although the latter usually spoke of child oblation in terms of an irreversible sacrifice to God, they were nonetheless sensitive to the social status of these children and the future benefits to be derived from the presence of aristocratic scions in their midst. The arrival of high-born oblates could occasionally lead to a restructuring of the community around the newcomers, who headed a list of names drawn up for purposes of commemorative prayer.<sup>62</sup> Yet the presence of aristocratic youngsters also had its drawbacks, for noble youths were notoriously difficult to discipline. Especially when their relatives were ready to come to their aid, conflicts could get out of hand. Gottschalk is the best example of this aristocratic fighting spirit: whether he was handed over as an unconditional sacrifice or as a strategic gift, this particular child refused to play along.<sup>63</sup>

Child oblation was fraught with tension and conflict of the kind outlined above. One thing is clear: it was the opposite of abandonment. Those donating children strove to create lasting ties with the sacred and therefore attempted to retain the ties with their children rather than relinquishing them. Although it was obvious to all concerned that God

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<sup>62</sup> See above, chapter III, § 3 and 4.

<sup>63</sup> See above, chapter II, § 4B.

was not an equal exchange partner, it was also evident that those giving away their children or land followed God's precepts, and would therefore benefit both in this world and the next. In understanding this phenomenon it is not very helpful to contrast calculating economic behaviour with religious unselfishness. The rigid opposition between the 'economic' and the 'religious' belongs to another age, when child oblation had become a thing of the past. The *oblatio puerorum* flourished in a world which saw nothing wrong with a mingling of interest and disinterest. As long as the crucial obligation to obey the 'law of gifts' was honoured, the donation of a child might serve a host of other purposes, none of which were necessarily at loggerheads with the religious principle of sacrifice.



## EPILOGUE

Sometime between 1123 and 1138 the prior of St Pantaleon in Cologne, Sibertus, sent an indignant letter to the former abbot of the community, Rudolf of St Trond, begging him for advice. A wealthy couple from the city had offered their son to the monastery as an oblate, demanding that he be accepted immediately, without the customary donation. The monks flatly refused. They had repeatedly tried to convince the father that he could not offer his son 'naked', but the man simply would not listen. He raged against St Pantaleon, claiming that the community was tempting him to commit simony, and then proclaimed all over town that the monks demanded money for things they should give for free. As a prominent citizen, the father succeeded in creating a veritable scandal, which seriously threatened St Pantaleon's reputation; at its wits' end, the community and its prior turned to its former abbot.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the outraged father had acted from self-interest or righteous indignation remains a moot point; being a child of his time, he must have been well aware of current ideology claiming that gifts should be free, and that sacred office could not be bought. The accusation of 'simony' was in the air.<sup>2</sup> Hence, he could manoeuvre his opponents into an uncomfortable position by pointing out that they should accept his son without any expectation of material reward; in fact, by insisting on their right to the child's inheritance the monks would be guilty of turning a gift to the sacred, which should be free, into an economic transaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf of St Trond, *Epistolae*, no. 1, p. 317: 'Tandem pater eius familiariter conventus, ut de rebus quas sibi concesserat Deus aliquid conferret aecclesiae, coepit furere, dicens se nolle symoniam incurrere. Hac arreptus furia, multa nos pulsavit iniuria, replevit fora et plateas, cives et aecclesiasticas movit personas, contestans apud nos precio constare quae iubemur gratis dare ... Et quia nota et urbana fuit persona, satis nos inquietavit hac infamia'.

<sup>2</sup> Within this context, the case is extensively treated by Lynch, *Simoniactal Entry into Religious Life*, pp. 83-90. See about simony also Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, pp. 63-7, 87-8.

Rudolf's refutation of these arguments naturally made the most of the father's supposedly malicious intentions. The man was masquerading as a paragon of virtue, Rudolf claimed, but in fact he withheld the obligatory donation in order to get his hands on his son's inheritance.<sup>3</sup> The abbot quoted amply from Benedict's Rule, and reassured Sibertus that accepting the inheritance of an oblate who needed food and clothing had nothing to do with avarice or simony. As long as the monks did not demand more than they needed to sustain a new member of the community, they were not to blame.<sup>4</sup> He then concentrated on the father's despicable avarice, portraying his adversary as inspired by the Devil himself.<sup>5</sup>

Some of Rudolf's arguments are traditional, such as his insistence that all riches, including children, came from God; hence, parents were obliged to 'return the fruit'. He also duly cited the example of Hannah and Samuel, denouncing the sacrilege committed by those who first vowed their child and then broke their sacred promise. This was the old repertoire dear to Hrabanus Maurus and other early medieval supporters of irrevocable child oblation; to some extent, Rudolf's arguments covered familiar territory. But his reply to his distraught community also touched upon issues peculiar to his own day and age. Whereas Hrabanus's treatise centered upon the sanctity of parental vows and the efficacy of the oblation ritual, Rudolf went straight for the jugular by denouncing the father's *avaritia*. Instead of

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf of St Trond, *Epistolae*, p. 318: 'Sed credo ad hoc vult emittere e seculo, ut partem illius retineat in sacculo. Utique hoc neque bonum neque iustum est, sed rapina mala et avaricia atque sacrilegium. Sacrilegium enim est, cum eum Deo obtulerit, si partem quae illi debetur sibi retinuerit'.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Nunc ad te michi conversio, pecuniose avare, nunc at te michi conversio. Convenio te, responde. Dic, quis te ducit spiritus, bonusne an malus, quia filium tuum domi onustum in coenobio vis intrudere vacuum et nudum? Hoc iccirco quero, quia probari debent talia spiritus si sint ex Deo. Sed non dubito quin debeas respondere: "Bonus", neque tu dubites quin ego asseram: "Malus". Et unde hoc probem, audi. Spiritus Domini bonus nunquam cuiquam bona sibi debiti tollit, nulli avariciam suadet, nullum patrem ab affectu filii propter aliquam substantiam abruptit, sed liberalitate manus et animi conglutinat et connectit. Tu autem per malum spiritum idolatriae, quae est avariciae, tollis filio tuo ei debita, quae offerre secum deberet in coenobio pauperibus Christi, famulantibus ibi Deo. Ecce malus qui te ducti spiritus, et propter malum quo probaris ducti spiritum, iuste es reprobrandus'.

complying with his obligation to give to God's poor, he argued, this rich man kept his son's inheritance to himself. In other words, by accusing his adversary of striving for selfish material gain, Rudolf made the most of another contemporary preoccupation, closely related to simony: the sin of avarice.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the father ridiculed the monks of St Pantaleon as a money-grubbing bunch, out to get their hands on his wealth. The controversy in Cologne thus revolved around this emerging opposition: gifts without strings attached versus purely economic transactions. Since the latter were perceived as a contamination of the sacred, religious foundations which for centuries had been accepting children and land as two self-evident parts of the same sacrificial act now found themselves cast in a disreputable role: as buyers and sellers on the market place.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, the father refusing to hand over his oblate son's inheritance could be accused of avarice, the sin *par excellence* of affluent citizens hoarding their possessions. The world in which Rudolf wrote was indeed different from the one Hrabanus had inhabited. The give-and-take of gift-exchange had by no means disappeared, but whenever lay donors and clerical recipients fell out over their mutual obligations, accusations of simony and avarice lay close at hand.

The quarrel in Cologne was about property and the disposal thereof, with the sin of avarice taking centre stage. Nothing whatsoever was said about the wishes of the boy over whose fate the controversy raged. He remained the entirely passive object of the conflicting aims of his elders. Within a few decades, however, the personal choice of child oblates was to become a real issue in canon law, resulting in a number of papal decisions favouring their right to return to the world once they had come of age. But as Nora Berend showed, the legal demise of irrevocable child oblation was not simply a matter of enlightened popes laying down the law; the ground was prepared by extensive debate between learned canonists, who in turn reacted to a gradually changing *communis opinio* around them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, pp. 59-80; Little, 'Pride goes before Avarice'.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf of St Trond, *Epistolae*, p. 323: 'Scimus igitur et pro constanti habemus, quod omnes aecclesiastica vendentes et ementes symoniaci sunt, et omnes heretici, et nulli heretici in aecclesia. Igitur omnes vendentes et ementes extra aecclesiam sunt ...'.

<sup>8</sup> Berend, 'La subversion invisible', pp. 125-6.

Two popes earned themselves the reputation of having put an end to 'old style' child oblation. Clement III (1187-1191) stressed the importance of child's consent at the time of his or her oblation, and demanded that the oblates should express this once more when they reached the onset of puberty, which was age twelve for girls or fourteen for boys. This was entirely in keeping with the legislation issued by Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) on marital consent, which used the same age limits drawn from Roman law. Clement's successor Celestin III (1191-1198) was even more specific, for he required all oblates reaching the age of discretion to make their own choice, regardless whether they had expressed prior agreement with their parents' vows or not.<sup>9</sup>

Such apparently sudden decisions built upon an already established legal tradition. They were like the tip of an iceberg, reflecting changed perceptions within learned circles and society at large. By the time these popes pronounced their views on child oblation, 'consent' had become a key issue in marriage law; unavoidably, jurisprudence about child oblates was affected by the notion that valid marriage vows could only be made by consenting and legally capable parties. This revolution took less than half a century. Gratianus still upheld the irrevocability of child oblation, quoting the familiar texts of the earlier Middle Ages, but various legal experts in his wake took a different line. A distinction was made within the group of those not yet having reached puberty: whereas children under seven were held to be legally incapable, those over seven – the so-called *doli capaces* – could make legally binding commitments. By the mid-twelfth century, the *doli capaces* loomed large in legal commentary on child oblation. The crucial question was whether children over seven were bound by the vows of their parents, provided they had expressed consent at the time of their oblation.

These ideas took some time to gain acceptance in Rome. Pope Alexander III (1159-1181), much committed to consent in marital affairs, still clung to the principle of irrevocability of parental vows when it came to child oblation.<sup>10</sup> But from the 1160s onwards canon-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> *Decretalium collectio*, X, 3. 31. 11, col. 572; cf. Berend, 'La subversion invisible', p. 129, n. 30, who concludes: 'Cette opinion tranche avec les idées d' Alexandre III sur le mariage'. About Pope Alexander's marriage legislation, see Donahue, 'The policy of Alexander the Third's consent theory of marriage', and

ists increasingly agreed that only children who were *doli capaces* at the time of their oblation, and had definitely expressed their assent when being handed over, remained bound to their parents' vows. Clement III and his successor Celestin III thus operated within a legal climate which for some decades had favoured personal consent.<sup>11</sup> Their 'policy' arose from practice, for legal precedent had been created by popes being asked to resolve problematic cases which had proved insoluble in the episcopal court. Such was the case of a boy who sued the community to retrieve his inheritance, claiming he had been forced into the monastery by his father.<sup>12</sup> To this complaint pope Celestin responded more radically than any of his predecessors, maintaining that a personal decision at the age of discretion was required of oblates, also if they had been *doli capaces* and in agreement with their parents when handed over. In other words, even those who had once consented could still change their minds at the onset of puberty.<sup>13</sup> When Pope Celestin reached this decision, his views were not yet shared by the majority of legal experts; in the episcopal court which had treated the case most lawyers had argued differently. The papal verdict was to have great influence, however, for it was published in the influential *Liber Extra* of 1234; by then, all traces of former controversy were scrupulously omitted. Obviously, a *communis opinio* had emerged: child oblation was only valid if the child in question had confirmed the parental vows through a personal profession at the onset of puberty.<sup>14</sup>

All this was in keeping with developments within the monastic world itself. New orders such as the Carthusians refused to accept

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Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, pp. 331-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263-74.

<sup>12</sup> *Decretales Gregorii IX*, 3.3.14, pp. 573-4; cf. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 313; Berend, 'La subversion invisible', p. 132; Doran, 'Oblation or obligation?', pp. 136-7.

<sup>13</sup> Most likely this meant the age of twelve for girls and fourteen for boys; cf. Berend, 'La subversion invisible', p. 132, n. 44. However, in a letter to the archbishop of Lyon Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) mentioned the fifteenth year as the appropriate age for oblates to choose for or against monastic life, thus conforming to the *aetas intelligibilis* of Benedict's Rule.

<sup>14</sup> Berend, 'La subversion invisible', p. 133.

prospective monks under twenty years of age;<sup>15</sup> the Cistercian statutes raised the minimum age of novices to fifteen in 1135 and to eighteen in 1157.<sup>16</sup> In the thirteenth century even Benedictine monasteries, the traditional bastion of child oblation, began having second thoughts about accepting children, and requested papal privileges permitting them to refuse such unwelcome gifts.<sup>17</sup> But the very fact that they needed such privileges suggests that parents continued to offer their children, irrespective of canon lawyers and monastic leaders who had changed their minds. Cistercian communities faced such pressures; in spite of the statutes setting minimum ages child oblates were offered and accepted.<sup>18</sup> The *Life* of St Stephen of Aubazine (Limousin) contains a whole cluster of stories about the children inhabiting the Cistercian community of Aubazine,<sup>19</sup> which Stephen's hagiographer summed up with a suitable biblical text: '*Ecce ego et pueri mei quos dedit Deus*' (Is 8, 18).<sup>20</sup> As they had for centuries, these boys embodied monastic 'sacred simplicity'. Aubazine's 'children's home' (*statio puerorum*) was filled with veritable ben-jamins. One of them had been educated by his mother in an adjacent nunnery until he was five years old, but then had to leave this safe haven to enter the *statio puerorum* of Aubazine. The brother who fetched the child and accompanied him to his new home curiously inquired about the behaviour of the women the child had grown up with. The boy said he had never seen women. His guide then decided to find out whether such innocence was genuine, and asked: 'Would you like to see real women?' Yes, the boy said, and the monk pointed at some goats grazing in the fields. The boy believed him, and, having reached Aubazine, he bragged to the other boys about having seen women grazing in the fields, much to the amusement of those youngsters who 'knew women better, but not in a more salutiferous

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<sup>15</sup> Guigo, *Consuetudines Carthusienses*, c. 27, cols. 691-2; re Grandmont, see *Regula venerabilis viri Stephani Muretensis*, c. 44, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> *Statuta Ordinis Cisterciensis*, a.1134, c. 78, p.31; *ibid.*, a. 1157, c. 28, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Schröteler, *Das Elternrecht*, p. 103. Requests came from famous ancient abbeys such as St Bertin and St Denis.

<sup>18</sup> See Lynch, 'The Cistercians and under-age novices'.

<sup>19</sup> *Vita sancti Stephani Obazinensis*, cc. 43-49, pp. 166-72.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 49, p. 172.

manner'.<sup>21</sup> The old and familiar theme of child oblates being completely shielded from the outside world, to the extent of becoming entirely oblivious of the difference between the sexes, still played a prominent role in thirteenth-century Cistercian hagiography, in spite of an official policy against accepting children into monastic communities.

The changes and continuities of late medieval child oblation still await in-depth investigation. In earlier centuries the notion that religious vows should result from a personal vocation had never quite disappeared, but had been superseded by the needs of the family, the community and the state. From the twelfth century onward, however, ideas which had long remained subcurrents gradually became mainstream thinking. Changing ecclesiastical opinion about child oblation must have interacted with the church's endeavour to promote freedom of contract as a crucial element in Christian marriage, but judging from the contradictory position taken by Pope Alexander III, the liberalisation of child oblation lagged somewhat behind the breakthrough of consensual marriage, at least where papal policy was concerned.<sup>22</sup> Such perceptual shifts were neither dramatic nor sudden; moreover, it was the clergy rather than the laity which was in the vanguard when it came to defending voluntary entry into religious life. After all, canon lawyers debated issues of liberty and contractual validity, while monastic communities were anxious not to get saddled with unsuitable and unwilling child oblates.

For parents and relatives matters were different. Even if they theoretically recognised the importance of personal vows, they must

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 47, p. 170: 'In monasterium feminarum quidam puer a matre sua nutriebatur cumque jam quinque annorum metas excederet, ultra enim illam etatem nullus ibi manere permittebatur, ejectus inde ad stationem puerorum in supradictam cellam directam est. Sed cum adhuc in itinere esset, a fratre interrogatus qui eum ducebat, quomodo se haberent femine inter quas fuerat educatus, ille respondit feminas se nunquam vidisse. Nam illas de quibus interrogabatur non feminas arbitratur, sed sorores. Sic enim eas semper vocari sciebat. Frater autem probare volens utrum hac simplicitate an figurate responderet, rursus eum interrogat: "Vis ergo feminas certe videre?" Quo respondente: "Volo", prospiciens eminus vidit capras pascentes et dixit ei: "Ecce isti femine sunt". Quod ille audiens non aliter credidit quam audivit et ad coevos perveniens, inter cetera jactabat se feminas in agro vidisse pascentes, simplicioribus quidem mirantibus, aliis irridentibus, qui feminas quidem certius, sed non felicius, agnovissent'.

<sup>22</sup> See above, n. 10.

also have insisted upon their rights to determine their offspring's future, as they tended to do in marital affairs and career choices. And, as the case of the Cistercian community of Aubazine shows, the traditional gift economy with its concomitant need to donate children to the sacred was not so easily dislodged. Pope Innocent IV (1242-1254) still needed to defend the principle of a personal decision for or against monastic life,<sup>23</sup> and at the same time ancient abbeys such as St Bertin and St Denis felt compelled to request the 'privilege' of refusing child oblates, meaning that parents went on offering their children.

Yet the range of options open to parents eager to secure an ecclesiastical career for their sons had grown. In the second half of the twelfth century, educational opportunities – especially within medieval cities – multiplied, so that monastic and cathedral schools no longer were the only place where one could acquire Latin literacy.<sup>24</sup> Hence, having one's son brought up in a religious community was no longer the only way to make him into a proper *litteratus*. These new educational opportunities also made it easier for religious orders not to accept child oblates while holding on to the principle that choir monks be literate. Thus, the status of adult converts to monastic life was much improved. Earlier, such *conversi* had been per definition illiterate, and therefore automatically excluded from the elite of the community, the monks in orders. In twelfth-century Cluny, however, choir monks were increasingly recruited from those who had acquired literate skills prior to entering the community.<sup>25</sup>

Adult novices now had joined the ranks of the potential priests. Moreover, they embodied new ideals of freedom of choice and personal vocation. As Peter of Blois put it in a letter to a woman claiming she had been forced to become a nun, 'if carnal marriage enjoys a recognised liberty, spiritual marriage is privileged with a fuller grace of liberty, for where the spirit is, there is liberty'.<sup>26</sup> Even within the Benedictine order such opinions gained ground, creating a clash between 'old' and 'new' monks: those who prided themselves

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<sup>23</sup> Metz, 'L'entrée des mineurs dans la vie religieuse', p. 199.

<sup>24</sup> Riché, 'Recherches sur l'instruction des laïcs'; Lesne, *Les écoles de la fin du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup>*, p. 517.

<sup>25</sup> Teske, 'Laien, Laienmönche und Laienbrüder', pp. 314-8.

<sup>26</sup> Peter of Blois, *Epistolae* no. 54, pp. 18-9, cited by Constable, 'Liberty and free choice in monastic thought and life', p. 107.



on having preserved a cloistered state of purity all their lives, and those who said they at least knew what they renounced when voluntarily embracing monastic life. Clearly, the latter were gaining the upper hand, while the 'old monks', recruited through child oblation, were forced into a defensive position. Writing in 1115-1117, Guibert of Nogent accurately depicted the demise of a once flourishing institution becoming obsolete in a changed world:

Thus in my youth in the oldest monasteries numbers had thinned, although they had an abundance of wealth given in ancient times and they were satisfied with small congregations, in which very few could be found who had rejected the world through scorn of sin; the churches were rather in the hands of those who had been placed in them by the piety of their kinsmen early in life. The less these monks were afraid of their own sins (for they imagined they had committed none), the more they lived a life of slackened zeal within the walls of their monasteries. Given administrative responsibilities and outside duties in accordance with the needs and wishes of their abbots, they were themselves eager enough to accept them, but they were inexperienced in outside freedom from restraint and had easy opportunities for wasting church funds, which were dispensed as the expenses of business or as free gifts. And as among them there was then little concern for religion, because of its rarity even fewer became monks.<sup>27</sup>

This was the problem in a nutshell: a growing tension between an established but dwindling group of old-style monks on the one hand, self-satisfied with having spent all their lives within the cloister, and new monks on the other, who were familiar with the ways of the world they had left behind of their own volition. Guibert himself had

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<sup>27</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, I, c. 8, p. 50-1: 'Unde nostris monasteria vetustissima numero extenuata temporibus, rerum antiquitus datarum exuberante copia, parvis erant contenta conventibus, in quibus perpauci reperiri poterant, qui peccati fastidio seculum respuissent; sed ab illis potissimum detinebantur ecclesiae qui in eisdem, parentum devotione contraditi, ab ineunte nutriebantur aetate. Qui quanto minorum super suis, quae nulla sibi videbantur egisse, malis, metum habebant, tanto intra coenobiorum septa remissione studio vicitabant. Qui administrationes ac officia forastica, cum pro abbatum aut necessitate, aut libitu sortirentur, utpote voluntatis propriae avidi, exteriores licentias minus experti, ecclesiasticas occasione facili delapidare pecunias, hiis expensis redditus seu gratuito dilargiri ... Et licet tum minus apud eos religio curaretur, ex sua siquidem fiebant raritate ipsi monachi cariores'. Transl. Benton, *Self and Society*, p. 54.

been consecrated to God, entering the monastery when he was twelve years old; the monks he accused of having neither administrative acumen nor spiritual zeal must have been much younger when they left the world. The controversy revolved around the question whether familiarity with the world outside was a good preparation for monastic life: did it represent a contamination or a source of useful knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Was sexual experience an enduring pollution, or could it – once renounced – be forged into a new spirituality?<sup>29</sup>

There is no reason to doubt Guibert's assessment of the lazy and clumsy old-style monks, but one may well wonder why nobody doubted the ability their Carolingian counterparts to take care of business outside the cloister. After all, *nutriti* then ran estates, participated in politics and travelled widely at the behest of their superiors, without anybody thinking them any less capable for having grown up in a monastic community. Clearly, Guibert's verdict belongs to a particular society and period which had come to regard child oblates with suspicion: they grew into good-for-nothing monks. Twelfth-century prejudice apart, those who thought so may have had a point. In his Chronicle of St Riquier, Hariulf of Oudenburg (d. 1143) nostalgically wrote of a great past in which 'every dignitary, where-soever he was in the kingdom of the Franks, rejoiced that he had a relative in the monastery'.<sup>30</sup> But when Hariulf wrote these words, this glorious period was drawing to a close. The best and brightest of twelfth-century aristocracy were no longer offered 'to God in the monastery' as a matter of course. From the late-eleventh century onwards, there were increasing complaints about parents dumping their superfluous and disabled children on monasteries. A famous early instance is Ulrich of Cluny's diatribe, voiced in a letter written between 1079 and 1087 to William of Hirsau, against the corruption of a holy institution by the greed of parents 'who, for the benefit of the family, commit to monasteries any hump-backed, deformed, dull

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Liber Anselmi per similitudines*, c. 78, p. 68; see above, chapter IV, § 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, pp. 9-16.

<sup>30</sup> Hariulf of Oudenburg, *Chronicon Centulense*, c. 10, pp. 118-9. The Chronicle was written approximately between 1085 and 1105; about Hariulf as a representative of 'old-fashioned' monasticism, see Hourlier, 'La spiritualité à Saint-Riquier d'après Hariulf', pp. 10-20.

or unpromising children they have'.<sup>31</sup> Such complaints have been projected back onto an earlier age,<sup>32</sup> but were in fact typical of a changing world in which Benedictine child oblation was no longer a natural choice the elite made for its male offspring. To boys, a growing range of alternatives presented themselves, including service in the royal bureaucracy, an intellectual career, or a military one abroad, while the new monastic orders attracted talent that would otherwise have been active within Benedictine communities.<sup>33</sup> But where aristocratic girls were concerned, things probably remained much the same as they had been in an earlier age, with marriage and the cloister being the only two viable options. Significantly, the complaints about parents off-loading their unsuitable children on monasteries were all concerned with boys, not with girls. Apparently no girl 'lame or maimed or hard of hearing or blind or humpbacked or leprous' found her way to the altar, or if she did, nobody was overly

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<sup>31</sup> Ulrich of Cluny, *Epistola nuncupatoria*, cols. 635-7. This letter congratulated William of Hirsau, himself an oblate, on having restricted the acceptance of children in his monastery. Whatever the case, Ulrich did not condemn child oblation it itself; on the contrary, he considered it a holy institution having come to grief because of parents only offering children they wanted to rid themselves of. Others denouncing such practices were Abbot William of Andrès (in 1161) and William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris from 1228 to 1249. See Lynch, *Sinoniacal Entry into Religious Life*, pp. 41-45, and Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 298-9.

<sup>32</sup> Boswell's conclusion that 'there are constant complaints in monastic literature about parents simply abandoning to monasteries children they do not wish to keep at home; cf. idem, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 298. *Quod non*; such complaints were voiced in Late Antiquity (see above, chapter I, § 1), and resurfaced only in the late eleventh century.

<sup>33</sup> See for example the conflict of Bernard of Clairvaux over his cousin Robert, who was given to Cluny as a child; he succumbed to the attractions of Clairvaux when he was fourteen, but, having found life too strict there, wished to return to Cluny. Bernard deemed Robert's profession in Clairvaux more important than his parents' vows made in Cluny, but Pope Calixtus II agreed with Robert that his oblation should prevail. Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistolae*, I, no. 1, c. 6, p. 5-6. Such squabbles reveal the competition between the 'old' and the 'new' monasticism. About changing recruitment patterns and the role of adult converts to monasticism in Cluny, see Teske, 'Laien, Laienmönche und Laienbrüder', pp. 313-21.

worried about it.<sup>34</sup> In the new world that emerged from the twelfth century onwards the oblation of boys became increasingly marginalised, it seems, while the daughters of the upper classes still faced oblation as an obvious alternative to marriage.

However tempting it may be to speculate about these changes, they deserve a more in-depth treatment than I can offer here. Such research will undoubtedly reveal the tenacity of old mechanisms of gift-exchange. Child oblation did not disappear overnight, even when Rome had decided that parents could no longer decide their children's fate through an act of sacrifice. As a metaphor for historical change the image of geological layers slowly pressing into each other is more suitable than that of an avalanche.

Some essential features of early medieval child oblation did disappear, however. The powerful no longer depended to such an extent upon monastic resources, spiritual and otherwise. The bastions of child oblation, Benedictine monasteries, were no longer the building blocks *par excellence* of royal and aristocratic power; in this sense, the monastic milieu in which child oblation had flourished also became marginalised. The fact that parents began to offer their lame or maimed offspring rather than their more precious children is a tell-tale sign, as is the father who claimed that he no longer needed to donate his son's inheritance because such a gift might amount to simony. Some of the basic assumptions on which the *oblatio puero-rum* was founded had indeed changed drastically, and child oblation gradually acquired the perturbing image still prevailing among modern historians and their public: that of a practice enabling parents to rid themselves of their superfluous children. But this may well have been a new phenomenon, in that more children survived to become 'superfluous'. Before the twelfth century, high infant mortality and female infertility created the opposite problem: a lack of offspring. The persistent hagiographical theme of barren parents vowing their first-born to God, if they would only be granted offspring, was not merely a biblical *topos*; the same goes for stories of saints being approached by desperate parents with dying children, promising their

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ulrich of Cluny, *Epistola nuncupatoria*, col. 635-6, who wrote of parents having 'a house full of sons and daughters', but evidently he had boys in mind when voicing his complaint; he spoke of them as becoming 'monachus'. The same goes for William of Andr s and William of Auvergne; see above, n. 19.

sons or daughters to the Church, provided they would be miraculously cured. Such miracles of fertility and healing reflected the fears and anxieties of people faced with the very real possibility that they would have no children whatsoever to inherit their wealth. This also explains why parents sometimes reneged on their promise; if the child oblate remained without healthy brothers or sisters, he or she was needed at home.

Authors like Guibert and Hariulf were acutely aware of a past in which child oblation had been a respected institution. Everyone had been proud to have a relative in St Riquier, Hariulf boasted; Guibert spoke of numbers having thinned precisely in the oldest monasteries, and of the 'abundance of wealth given in ancient times'. Their observations reflect a past in which giving a child 'to God in the monastery' had been a much sought-after privilege granted only to the happy few, who could afford to give abundantly. Child oblation once held a promise for future wealth and power for the parents or relatives concerned; it represented an investment in long-term *familiaritas* with those mediating between God and mankind, and it opened opportunities to the child in question, who was destined to be part of a community closely connected to both terrestrial and supernatural power.

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